FEMINIST PERSPECTIVES IN THE FICTION OF
SUNITI NAMJOSHI

ABSTRACT
OF THE
THESIS
SUBMITTED FOR THE AWARD OF THE DEGREE OF
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IN
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BY
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Abstract

Even after acquiring an important status in literature and writing, women writers still face problems in getting due recognition. Critics and literary world have paid more attention to many women writers, but ignored others who too are prolific, competent and worthy of success. Due to one or the other factor they have been marginalized and thus lag behind and do not attain significant position in literature. Most of these are now beginning to realize their potential, and will go further in directions as yet unimagined. They also have committed themselves to fictionalizing women’s causes with a view to ameliorate their position and release them from the state of traditional servitude. The present thesis studies the work of one such writer Suniti Namjoshi who too has favourably responded to the changing social, political, sexual and psychological realities of subalterns and the marginalized and has questioned their position in the androcentric patriarchal domain.

Suniti Namjoshi is best known as a fabulist and her work encompasses issues such as gender, sexual orientation, unequal power distribution, cultural identity, human and animal rights. She takes into consideration the construction of gender identities in an androcentric society and also explores the position of lesbians on the margins of the compulsory heterosexual order. Her writings reflect the multiple attributes of a post-modern, radical-lesbian feminist encapsulated in Eco-feminist and the Third World feminist aspects. She is the first Indian woman diasporic writer who is known as the out of the closet lesbian. She is of the view that one’s sexuality is one’s own personal choice and that compulsory heteronormativity is an oppressed social construction that leads to the subordination of women. She is also a re-visionist myth maker whose corpus is marked with, fantasy, inter- textuality and allusions, and is counted among prolific feminist fairy tale writers and fabulists, and carries a noticeable resemblance to Angela Carter and Margaret Atwood in terms of subject matter and creativity. Her canvas is quite broad and encompasses the tales from Panchatantra and Jataka, Arabian Nights, Grimm Brothers, Hans Anderson as well as Hindu and Christian mythologies. She applies animal fantasy and builds utopian/dystopian worlds and science fictions.

Being a diasporic writer she weaves her work with nostalgia and autobiographical elements. She suffers from displacement and alienation for being a woman of colour, a lesbian and a Hindu in the male-dominated, heterosexual,
Christian and Western World. Her work reflects the experiences that she herself had undergone during her life and provides her writings with a self-referential stroke. Her Indianness is apparent in her collection in which she uses Western myths and legends alongside Indian and Eastern mythologies and anecdotes. Like Atwood and Carter, Namjoshi uses gothic elements along with magic and miracles in order to mesmerize and enchant the readers. She is a non-conformist who not only defies societal norms but also regulations and standards of literary genre.

Her distortion of the original myths and the fairy tales and the revisioning and rewriting them, is a means to question the conventional male biases about women. Her collection, *Feminist Fables (1981)* encompasses the large variety of experiences of the subordinated and the marginalized, and fictionalizes their cause with a view to upgrade their position and release them from traditional enslavement. She has analyzed the effects of women’s oppression at multiple levels such as reproduction, education, employment, self determination, political voice, body image, working to make it clear how these are part of a larger system of oppression. By constructing mythical characters, Namjoshi deconstructs the notion of conventional gendering and emphasizes the irrelevance of human particularities. She also points out that identities are not fixed. They are ‘fluid’ and can be transformed into the desired shape. The process of change is painful yet essential. A new path has to be forged outside patriarchal discourse. The new identity is not a limited one as it is ‘fluid’. Bhadravati, the Brahmini lesbian cow, appears like a goddess to Suniti- the protagonist in *The Conversations of Cow (1985)*. She is the cow of a thousand faces who knows the art of transmutation. Her attributes symbolize that identity is constitutive of as well as by the persona.

Namjoshi’s concern is the actual process of marginalization and ‘othering’ through which the dominant cultures perpetuate patriarchal ideologies. In *The Blue Donkey Fables (1988)*, she criticizes the institutions which have created fixed notions about identities and female bodies. She dismantles binaries of good and evil, heroism and cowardice, wisdom and foolishness, truth and lies, angels and saints etc. Being the propagator of ecofeminism which takes the issues of women along with nature and animals’ rights, Namjoshi projects the fictional animals as dignified beings who unlike the real animals have self respect and resist humiliation. She shows her concern for ordinary animals such as cats, monkeys, donkeys, piglets, rabbits, frogs etc. who have been marginalized not only in the real world but also in literature. Suniti
Namjoshi’s fiction attempts to establish an alternative universe through the use of the fantasy mode. She resorts to fantasy not to escape from reality but to reconstruct it. Through the use of animal imagery, Namjoshi discusses the problems of the Third World women writers, animals’ rights, power hierarchy and sexual orientation. She disrupts mainstream notions of gender, race, nationality and sexual preference.

In *The Mothers of Maya Diip* (1989), Namjoshi applies different radical feminist’s theories and puts the idea that discarding male domination would liberate the world from oppression. Procreation has been made suppressive by men. She wants to free women from biological maternity so as to free maternity from male domination. The inner world of Namjoshi’s narrative accommodates multiple lesbian perspectives. Female desire is discussed openly and unabashedly. She redeems the dignity of women and presents them as satisfied happy beings who celebrate their own sex and femininity. She also insists upon to create a new discourse of maternity that can generate societal association to provide women a new identity where they do not feel the necessity to decide between a career and motherhood.

Namjoshi fundamentally questions the appropriacy of the tales told to children. Fairy tales and fables heard in childhood shape the notion of right and wrong and influence one’s adult roles. In *Saint Suniti and the Dragon* (1993) she not only questions the notions of evil and good but also propagates feminine solidarity and attempts to find solutions to the dilemmas of contemporary existence. Through her collection *The Solidarity Fables*, Namjoshi questions sexual politics and challenges the patriarchal constructs. She is against forceful adoption of heterosexuality, but she does not propagate lesbianism, as the choice of one’s own sex is purely a personal issue. She inspires marginalized groups to struggle for identity and autonomy.

Male writers developed their own culture of writing in which the role of women was marginalized and excluded. Her work *Building Babel* (1996) is suggestive of the process of the development of a new culture of writing that is gynocentric in nature. She also deals with the writer, art of writing, reader and readership and emphasizes the use of web to make reading and writing interesting and convenient. *Goja: An Autobiographical Myth* (2000), continues with the aspect of power hierarchy, identity crisis and sexual orientation in an androcentric society. Her use of fantasy fills the gap between the huge divisions such as the East and the West, rich and the poor, lesbian and straight etc.
Apart from being a poet, a fabulist and a novelist, Suniti Namjoshi has experimented with Children's Literature as well. As a feminist, she is dissatisfied with the dominant male discourse of traditional fairy tales, the sexist social values and institutions it supports. Namjoshi's fairy tales aim at a just society that can be gleaned from the redirection of socialization process. Her tales provide equal status to both young boys and girls without discriminating. She emphasizes equal participation of children in every sphere of life. Like other fairy tale writers she provides equal opportunities. All the tales of Aditi Adventures I- Unlikely Friends, attempt to explore the psyche of children of the contemporary modern world. While providing amusement to children, the tales establish respect and affinity with creatures other than the Anglo- Saxon heterosexual male. They break down stereotypes, boundaries and categories, and challenge the stringency of norms applied to society by patriarchy.

As children are the primary audience of fairy tales, these tales play an important role in early socialization. Feminist fairy tale writers try to change our outlook and defy our perception with regard to literature and society. Saints, Angels, Monsters, Dragons, Witches, all have been perceived with fixed identities. Fairy tales are considered therapies for children as they open up unexplored spheres. A characteristic feature of fairy tale is to sort out existential quandary or quest for identity. This enables children to deal with crises and predicaments. Children are thus able to master psychological problems.

Aditi Adventures II- The Unexpected Monsters is concerned with legendary characters of Europe, recast by the writer to dismantle biases associated with them. The tales act as directories to liberate children from ego disturbances with the use of fantasy that has the power to make the unfamiliar familiar. They also serve as guides for parents to deal with the difficulties of taming and raising children in an appropriate manner.

Aditi Adventures III- Heroes make children aware of the prevailing disparities and train them to counter the sinister forces of society. Her use of binaries and paradoxes such as magic/ realism, rationalism/ sentimentalism along with the advancement in science and technology is a means to elevate the Third World nations such as India. As modern tales they are enriched with the use of hi- tech gadgets and cultivate rationality along with the vital fairy tales contents such as, fantasy, miracles and magic in order to deal with the problems of the real world.
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For my family which supported me to cover the journey of a thousand miles.
This is to certify that Ms. Farha Naz Farrukh has completed her thesis entitled *Feminist Perspectives in the Fiction of Suniti Namjoshi* under my supervision. To the best of my knowledge this is her original work.

Signed by:

Seemin Hasan
(Prof. Seemin Hasan)
Supervisor
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Yashika Naz Farrukh
(Farha Naz Farrukh)
Suniti Namjoshi

Source: www.thehindu.com/features/magazines/fables-for-are-times/article110085
Chapter One

Introduction

“The Authentic Lie”
Introduction

The term ‘Feminism’ was coined by Alexander Dumas, a French dramatist in the year 1872. The term was first applied to the voice raised for the cause of women which later expanded its canvas and took up the issues of race, class, sex and gender. Infinite number of meanings and connotations are conferred by different theorists and philosophers on feminism. Cambridge Dictionary defines it as “the belief that women should be allowed the same rights, power, and opportunities as men and be treated in the same way, or the set of activities intended to achieve this state.” Webster Dictionary says, “Feminism is the theory of the political, economic and social equality of the sexes. It is an organized activity on behalf of women’s rights and interests.”

Over the past 2500 years, women writers and scholars across the globe have expressed their views about gender roles and struggled for equality. Some philosophers trace the roots of feminism to Sappho of ancient Greece (630- 570 B.C). She is followed by Hildegard of Bingen (1098- 1179), Christine de Pisan (1364-1430), Modesta di Pozzo di Forzi (1555- 1592), Hannah Woolley (1622- 1675), Olympes de Gouge (1748- 1793), Mary Wollstonecraft (1759- 1797), and Jane Austen (1775- 1817) etc. who are considered the foremothers of the modern women’s movement. All these writers have promoted the dignity, intelligence and basic human potential of the female gender.

You may forget
But let me tell you
this: someone in some future time
will think of us.

_Sappho_

Sappho (630- 612 BC), is one of the greatest Greek lyricists and a few identified women poets of the primitive world. Many theorists consider her to be the founder of literary feminism. She belonged to an elite family and married a merchant and also had a daughter. Coming from a wealthy background, Sappho had the opportunity to chose pastimes according to her own will. She decided to work on the arts on the isle of Lesbos. Sappho is acknowledged as a lyric poet even by patriarchs of classical literature. The scholars of Hellenistic Alexandria named her as “one of the nine melics or musical poets”, while Plato called her “the tenth muse” (_Adventures in_
ministry). The uniqueness of her verses makes them so distinct that they came to identify as Sapphic meter. It is quite unfortunate that most of Sappho’s works is lost. The work that survived is fragmentary. Sappho’s artifacts describe her as a sibian archetype. The word ‘lesbian’ is derived from the isle of Lesbos, while the term ‘Sapphic’ is used as an adjective in the modern literary world for women who are other women.

Hildegard of Bingen was born in 1098, the period of Eleanor of Aquitaine, and Abelard and Bernard of Clairvaux. At this time Chartres Cathedral was built and two great universities were established. Hildegard too is considered as one of the most significant figures in the history of Middle Ages. She has written more than hundred tales to emperors, popes and nuns; about seventy two songs and a play. She is listed as “the Dear Abby of the twelfth century” (Kiefer) by some biographers. Her important works are theological viz. Scivias (Know the Paths), Liber Vitae Meritorum on Ethics), and De Operatione Dei.

Christine de Pisan wrote Epistre au Dieu d’ Amour (Epistle to the God of love) in the 15th C in defense of her gender. Her early works consist of ballads of lost ve which she wrote in the memory of her husband. She wrote ballads, rondels, rs and complaints. She wrote ten volumes in verse that include Le Livre des trois vertus (Book of Three Virtues) written in 1405, a sequel that categorizes the roles of women and the constructed moral instructions for them in medieval society, Le Livre la Cite’ des Dames (The Book of the City of Ladies) also written in 1405, depicting e heroism and goodness of women. She wrote on the life of the deceased King arles- Le Livre des Fais et Bonnes Meurs du Sage Roy Charles V (Book of the eds and Morals of the Wise King Charles V) in 1404 at the request of Philip the old of Burgundy which is an original treatise on Charles V and his court. Her last work, Le Ditie’ de Jehanne d’ Arc (1429), is a lyric written in celebration of the stories of Joan of Arc.

Modesta di Pozzo or Moderata Fonte (1555- 1592) born in Venice, is one of the most appealing Italian women writers of 16th C. ‘Moderata Fonte’ is her eponym. Modesta had been writing since her childhood. Il merito delle donne (The irth of Women) is her best known dialogue published posthumously in 1600 which also the debate on sex roles. She has also published Il Florido, her chivalric mance in 1581 and two poetic narratives of Christ’s passion and resurrection in the ar 1582 and 1592 respectively. Tredici Cantidel Floridoro is her earliest unfinished
chivalric romance which came out in 1581. The *Florido* narrates the adventures of young prince Florido and his would be bride Celsidora, with a sub-plot of the adventures of the female knight Risamante. Her other works, *Le feste* (*Celebrations*), a dramatic dialogue and a narrative poem, *La Passione di Christo* (*The Passion of Christ*) were published in 1582. The latter is a well known religious poem of 16th C Italy written in *ottava rima* typical of chivalric romance. The poem emphasizes the female protagonist of the Gospel, the Virgin Mary Magdalen. *Le feste* is a dialogue between a stoic and an Epicurean philosopher on the importance of virtue and pleasure in human life. It was performed before Doge Niccolo da Ponte on St. Stephen's Day, December 26th 1581.

Hannah Woolley was born in 1622. She published books on household management. Her publication, *The Cook's Guide* (1664) is dedicated to Lady Anne Wroth whose household Woolley had served. Her first book *The Ladies Directory in Choice Experiments and Curosities* was published in 1662. Along with her husband, she ran two boarding schools. She began writing cook books after his death in 1661. She continued her career with *The Queen-like Closet*, and remarried in around 1666-1669. It is suspected by one of the modern editors of her work that *Gentle Woman's Companon or A Guide to the Female Sex* (1673) is a work by Woolley.

Marie Olympe de Gouges of Montauban is a French author (1748-1793) who is best known for supporting the French Revolution. She is a political writer and a successful playwright. She belonged to a poor family. Her father was a butcher, while her mother was a maid servant. She was a self educated woman who wrote plays, novels and socio-political pamphlets. Her dramatic works include *Le Mariage inattendu de Cherubin* and *Zamore et Mirza ou l' Heureux naufrage*. She read political work that helped to propagate human rights specifically for women. Her reformatory political works were intended to bring about change without sacrificing the social stability. Her *Droits de la femme* (1788) articulated advanced revolutionary ideals, while the *Patriotic Remarks* (1788) advocated the distortion of monarchical government, and also presented the abuses of the elite class with the agenda of social reforms. Her work *Project of a Patriotic Case by Citoyenne* is a political satire. She produced two more satires, *Cry of Wise by a Woman* and *To Save the Fatherland*. Her socio-political works primarily focused upon the issues of civil rights, particularly the rights of women. She believed in complete equality of all human beings. She asserted the women's rights in her document *The Declaration of the Rights of Woman and the
tizen in 1791. She is known as a member of radical groups, and also advocated for
equality of the sexes, job opportunities for women, better educational rights for
dis, and the establishment of a theatre that would produce plays exclusively written
by women. She also emphasized the liberty of speech, women’s suffrages and the
portunity to seek public office. In 1793, she was executed for crimes against the
government.

Mary Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, is an extension
French Revolution as it emphasizes the idea of liberty, equality and fraternity for
men with the inclusion of women. Her work is a counter attack on Rousseau’s
nile that rejects intelligence in women. She stresses upon providing equal
opportunities and equal rights to both the sexes. Apart from these writers, Jane
Asten, Charlotte and Emile Bronte, Virginia Woolf etc. are the precursors of the
minist movement.

It was not until the late 19th C. that the efforts for women’s equal rights
alesced into a clearly recognizable movement, or rather a series of movements. In
the UK and the US, the urban industrialization and liberal social politics during the
earliest 20th centuries can be traced as the first wave of feminism. The
rst wave of feminists did not call themselves “feminists”. The term was first used in
the late 1960s with the emergence of second wave feminism. In a number of countries
the emergence of a new feminism after the second world war began came to be
own as second wave feminism which reflected the consequences and the new
rections caused by the war, while prior to the war was considered as the first wave.
he aim of the first wave was to provide women the right to suffrage, educational
ights, birth control, equal marriage laws and post-marital property rights. The wave
rst initiated at Seneca Fall Conventions set off by Elizabeth Cady Stanton (1815-
02) which highlighted the new movement’s ideology and political strategies in
48, when 300 men and women assembled and raised voice for the cause of women.

In the initial phase, feminism was inter-connected with the restrained and
ciliationist movements. Women adopted unconventional ways after making public
ches, going to jail and defying domesticity. The well-known first wave feminists
in UK include, Barbara Bodichon and Bessie Rayner Parkes. Those from US include,
an B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Alice Paul, Matilda Joslyn and Jane
ams. The wave primarily took into account the cause of the middle class educated
omen.
The second wave of feminism began in 1960s and continued till 1990s. In the US it was influenced by the Civil Rights Movement while in the UK by the labour rights movement. The tone of the second wave was increasingly radical, and dealt with reproductive rights and sexuality. Mc Hugh points out:

Women’s bodies became sites of political contest as the right to bodily integrity and self-determination became focal points of second wave feminism. The UK abortion Act in 1967 and the 1973 US ruling in Roe V. Wade giving women the right to have safe, legal abortions were important movements in second wave feminism. (120)

The phrase ‘personal is political’ was the significant slogan of the time. It depicted marriage, gender norms and domesticity as political. The slogan encompassed issues related to low pay scales of women and abortion rights. Many feminists urged the state administration to form laws against rape and domestic violence so as to provide security to women in every sphere of life. The movement insisted on the assurance of social egalitarianism irrespective of sex. Anti-sexual attacks and domestic violence operations were conducted.

Second wave feminism had Lesbianism on its agenda. Lesbians felt marginalized within the dominant discourse of women’s movements and also by the movement of gay liberation. The slogan ‘woman-identified woman’ became popular among them. One major group known as Radicalesbians considered heterosexuality to be the root cause of women’s oppression. Many radical lesbian feminists such as Adrienne Rich and Catherine Mac Kinnon argued that there was no man-woman relationship that was free of violence and compulsion. Many women’s organizations and consciousness raising groups such as NOW were formed with women assembling to discuss their experiences as women during 1970s. “The BITCH Manifesto” and “Sisterhood is Powerful” became the major publications of the time. Betty Freidan’s The Feminine Mystique (1963) attained the status of a best-seller that projected the mental and emotional trauma of middle-class US women bound to home and domesticity. Theories and movements other than feminism such as, neo-Marxism and psychoanalytic theory submerged with the second wave, and thus connected the cause of women with capitalism and heteronormativity. Second wave feminism also attempted to differentiate between sex and gender as the former being biological, and the latter a societal construct. It largely took into account the cause of the white
middle-class women and considered women of colour, and the problems of the third world women as divisive to the movement.

The third wave of feminism began in the mid-1990s and is influenced by post-modern ideology and Third World feminism. It is a critique of second wave for considering the issues of only white middle-class women. The third wave deals with a number of aspects of marginalization of women and other oppressed groups. Many constructs originated earlier, have been destabilized, including the one related to body, universal womanhood, sexuality, gender, prostitution and heteronormativity. A characteristic feature of third wave feminism that had amazed the earlier feminists is the "readoption by young feminists of the very lipsticks, high heels and make-up" (Rampton). Many second wave feminists criticized the third wave for not concentrating on women's issues and the marginalization of the subalterns, while the latter called themselves activists who imparted the same idea but in a different manner. They argued that gender oppression could not be dealt with separately rather it is connected with other forms of discriminations. According to Rampton, the "grrls" of third wave defined "feminine beauty for themselves as subjects not as objects of sexist patriarchy" (Rampton). They used media and web as important features for creating space exclusively for women. Grrl-feminism is universal and shuns false identity, sexuality and gender. The third wave broke the norms of earlier feminist movements.

As feminism advanced a pace, there remained differences of opinions and tensions within its realm. Many theories and ideologies emerged out of the umbrella term 'feminism'. Radical feminism, Queer theory, Psychoanalytic theory, Third World feminism, Eco-feminism, Post-modern feminism etc. are some that are adopted by different feminist writers to encompass the movement. Radical feminism evolved out of the women's liberation movement of the 1960s. Radical feminists argue that to abolish the patriarchy's oppression of women, new political, social and economic groups are required to be constructed. Radical feminists considered gender oppression the root of other oppressions, in order to abolish inequality, the elimination of the subjugation of women and the end of institutionalized heterosexuality was essential. Radical feminism suffered from cultural and democratic destruction. The Libertarian-radical feminism questioned the sex/gender structure and sought to break it. It acknowledged that, "women are no more destined to be
passive than men are destined to be active" (Tong 49). Kate Millet in *Sexual Politics* (1970) argued that to achieve this goal, the shift from gender-based structure of society by androgynic system is required. *The Dialectic of Sex* (1970) by Shulamith Firestone considers women's nurturative and reproductive role as the sole cause of their decay, and that to free them from such roles the construction of new social structure and advanced technologies of reproduction, such as artificial insemination are required. Another major liberal radical feminist Marilyn Frye encourages lesbianism and discards heterosexual standards as they reduce women to minute creatures, unnoticed in an androcentric world. Mary Daly, a cultural radical feminist emphasizes the retention of womanhood and feminine characteristics free from male oppression. She also stresses upon the development of essential female behaviour which women should celebrate without being muddled with masculine traits and standards.

A group called Radicalesbians drew connections between the denial of male ascendancy and the affirmation of sexual love for other women. The essay "The Woman-Identified Woman" (1970), defines lesbianism as an expression of anger. Kreps argues that for the women's self-hate and identity crises are rooted in male-given roles, thus "only women can give to each other a new sense of self" (239). They try to redeem the dignity of lesbians after discarding the ignominy of their mental illness associated with their love and affection for other women. Radicalesbian feminists consider lesbians as unconscious feminists who resist documentation. In the 1970s, lesbians made attempts to enhance women potential after running book stores, organizing conferences and concerts for the cause of lesbians. In reaction to the elimination of lesbian movement from the mainstream feminism, separate awareness raising groups and committees were formed who explained their culture and demanded its legitimacy in songs and essays. Along with the fledging gay liberation movement; lesbian feminists helped to falsify an influential concept of sexual identity.

Queer theory developed in gay and lesbian studies in 1990s and is associated with the radical gay politics of Act Up, Outrage and other groups which labeled queer to separatist politics. In cultural theory, queer theory is said to be a challenge to both homosexuality and heterosexuality, as it defines sexuality as dynamic and multiple, and fluid according to cultural context. To queer is to render normal sexuality as weird and disturbed, and to challenge heterosexuality as a naturalized social-sexual norm. It challenges the hegemony of straight ideology and endorses the concept of
digression. The influential work of Judith Butler, particularly *Gender Trouble* (1990), with its broadly over-used concept of ‘performative’ sexuality and gender identity, discards fixed categories altogether. She confronts the terms as gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender and points out that they bear no meaning when stripped of the institutional means that support them. In her work *Undoing Gender* (2004), she says that “queer theory is understood, by definition, to oppose all identity claims, including sex assignment.” (Butler 7) Queer theory is supposed to be hazardous, by some feminists, for feminist theory as it makes investigative gender studies.

Psychoanalytic feminist theory is both for and against women and thus perpetuates sexual politics. Oedipus Complex is the root cause of subjugation of women. The notion originated from Sigmund Freud’s *Three Contributions to the Theory of Sexuality, Infantile Sexuality* and *The Transformation of Puberty*. Feminist criticism and Psychoanalytic theory both give importance to Oedipus complex, relationship between sexuality and its expression, instability of identity, psychic affiliations between parents and children, dreams examination etc. Kate Millet, Sandra Gilbert, Susan Gubar and Simone de Beauvoir etc. are some feminist psychoanalysts.

Third World feminism is generated by Third World women or women of colour. Chandra Talpade Mohanty in her introduction to *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism* (1991) defines it as:

> Imagined Communities of women with divergent histories and social locations, woven together by the political threads of opposition to forms of domination that are not only pervasive but also systematic... (t)he idea of imagined community is useful because it leads us away from essentialist notions of third world women struggles, suggesting political rather than biological or cultural bases for alliance. (4)

However, the everyday lifestyle of third world women is distinct, their political struggles unite them together to form a common bond between them. Their race, poverty, work, ethnicity and a critique of the mainstream white feminist movement provide them a common voice.

Francoise d’ Eaubonne, a French feminist philosopher first used the term Ecofeminism in her work *Le féminisme ou la mort* (1976). She argues that the androcentric view of looking at women as mere reproductive bodies is the root cause of environmental destruction, for the increase in population leads to the ruining of
ecological balance. She thus stresses upon the elimination of patriarchy in order to balance nature and environment. Rosemary Ruether in New Women/New Earth (1975) furthered Eaubonne’s ideology and brought out the notion that the emancipation of women could not be achieved without the reshaping of our behaviour towards the environment. According to her, women’s strong spiritual, emotional and physical affiliation to nature, create cultural interactions with it.

Eco-feminism also has multiple approaches to feminism. Karren Warren in Ecofeminist Philosophy (2000) argues that “[e]cological feminists (“ecofeminists”) claim that there are important connections between the unjustified dominations of women, people of colour, children, and the poor and the unjustified domination of nature” (1). It shifts the objective approaches of Western Sciences by creating a relationship between nature and the human world, including animals. It comes out with the truth that the patriarchal framework of society is approximately two thousand years old while matriarchy prevailed prior to it. The works that propagate the theories of eco-feminism are God was a Woman by Manja Gimbuta and The Creation of Patriarchy by Gerda Lerner. The Chalice and the Blade of Eisler is often considered as the Bible of Eco-feminist theory. It is specifically powerful in radical feminism and Green Movement.

Post-modern Feminism is deeply influenced by Simone de Beauvoir’s The Second Sex, Jacques Derrida’s theory of ‘difference’, and Lacanian Psychoanalytical theory. It originated in France in 1970s with the works of Helene Cixous, Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray etc. The theory points out that the power and position in a society are decided by race, class, sex and ethnicity. The theory is criticized for being excessively prosaic and politically invaluable for women as it did not focus on the realistic approach of male domination of women and their freedom struggles. Many post-modern feminists would argue against these criticisms. Unbearable Weight (1993) by Susan Bordo, a post-modern writer, is the evaluation of contemporary media and advertising agencies’ rude perception of women’s bodies. Mc Hugh points out:

... Post-modern analysis can help us to read how the body is made to be text and teaches us to read advertising such that we come to understand how we embody messages. Through this critical lens women can learn to resist the pull of cultural messages about their bodies. (103)
The writings of post-modern critics transcend the boundaries of feminism and offer women freedom from oppressive thought.

Women composed to break their silence. They were heard only after they began writing. Women's writing, then, is like a growing consciousness. Their writing influences their very being in the socio-cultural settings as it hastens their shift from margins to the centre. Much of women's writing has been rejected for two centuries by patriarchal discourse. Thus, attempts were made to provide recognition to women writers in the mainstream culture, but the non-white writers still struggle to be acknowledged in women's literature.

Literature is the mirror of society but society is also patterned by literature. Indian literature was traditionally dominated by men writers. It tells the story of half of humanity leaving women unnoticed. Women's writings brought them out from the shackles of the stereotypical roles of Savitri, Sita and Pativrata. Now the Indian literary women are no more submissive, meek and docile, rather they are active and ready to take on the challenges of the harsh androcentric world:

The concept of Indian womanhood is as divergent as the country itself and has undergone drastic and dramatic changes from era to era. India has traveled from her glorious past to degeneration; from spiritual ascendance to communal clashes; from captivity to independence; from agrarian revolution to cyber technology. The role of the Indian woman has also changed from that of deity to devadasi, from shakti to abala, from homebound creature to a professional. (Shukla)

Toru Dutt and Sarojini Naidu were the pioneers who made way and inspired the new generation of writers in English. Their poetry is the submersion of both the Eastern and the Western style of writing. The credit for writing the first novel in India goes to Krupabai Satthianadhan with her debutant novel Kamala: The Story of a Hindu Child-Wife written in 1894. The novel is considered to be revolutionary and reformative. The protagonist however is presented as a stereotypical woman who gradually evolves into an active modern woman who is capable of helping and protecting other women. Her other novel Saguna, is the realistic account of the life of a Christian woman. These novels have formed women's solidarity along religious lines. Sevantibai M. Nikambe published an autobiographical novel Ratanbai: A Sketch of a Bombay High Caste Hindu Young Wife in 1895. It narrates the story of a
Hindu girl, married at nine, and her struggle to attain education. These novels were inspired by the Age of Consent Act of 1891. The Hindu *andarmahal* is depicted in *Kamala*, and in 1944 Iqbalunnisa Hussain projected the life of a Muslim woman of a traditional Muslim household. Her novel *Purdah and Polygamy: Life in an Indian Muslim Household* (1944) is a feminist novel which is autobiographical in nature. Most of Indian women writers have common themes in their novels. Tejero points out that almost all of them apply their personal experiences, use autobiographical elements, identify themselves with their female characters and finish up in a feminist tone (Tejero). These writers bore the impact of the 19th C. reform movements. In the year 1917, the movement for women's suffrage started. Many activists of All India Women's Conference such as Sarojini Naidu, Amrit Kaur, Annie Beasant and many other supplemented the cause of women.

The post-independence era has a plethora of women writers who are prolific, devoted and rich in terms of theme and technique. They are committed to society and their agenda and belief is to make literature a vehicle of change. The stunning spurt of female talent brought forth a host of women writers. Stalwart among them are Anita Desai, Kamala Markandaya, Nayanatra Sehgal, Ruth Prawar Jhabvala, Shobha De etc. The writers of the post-independence phase move inward. They get more and more inclined to evaluate the sociological impact on the psyche of their characters.

Fiction by women writers exhibits innate capacities, assets of perception, a storehouse of meaning and a center of debates. Anita Desai like Joyce and Woolf, is widely acknowledged as the pioneer of the psychological novel in modern English literature. Her novels such as *Where Shall We Go This Summer, Cry the Peacock, Fire on the Mountain* etc. deal with women’s plight, their sense of alienation and quest for identity. Kamala Markandaya’s *Nectar in a Sieve* (1954) is preoccupied with the theme of the East-West encounter while Ruth Pravar Jhabvala’s *To Whom She Will* (1955) has imparted a psychological profundity and captured shades of life from the East as well as the West. Kamala Markandaya is the first woman novelist to present a varied collection of fictional women. Ira in *Nectar in a Sieve* comes out as the heir of the Victorian new woman. Rejected by her husband for being infertile, she looks after her brother starving herself to nurture and feed him at the time of famine. Her mother Rukmini does not diverge from the replica of Indian wife, dedicating herself entirely to Nathan, her husband who betrays her. *Some Inner Fury, Possession* and *The Nowhere Man* deal with the trials and tribulations that a woman faces
emerging out of east-west encounter. Venu Chitale wrote *In Transit*, the narrative of three generations of a Brahmin joint family and documented the evolution of India from colonial times to independence. The theme of conjugal conflicts find place in Ruth Pravar Jhabvala’s fiction as well. Whatever quarrels occur in a marriage are typically due to women’s growing awareness of their self and the ensuing sense of estrangement from the male culture. Veena Paintal presents upper middle-class women still tolerating marital atrocities in the hope of becoming an ideal patriarchal wife but they soon realized that it is not possible until the husband becomes equally devoted. So either they commit suicide or walk out of their relationship.

A shift in the narrative paradigm of Indian English fiction took place with the publication of “Towards Equality: Report of the Committee on the status of women in India” in 1974 as it brought about a large impact on post 1975 women’s writing. The report was the disillusionment of the idea of equality for those who had been living with the false notion of equality. A number of meetings were held and a number of committees were formed to speak for the cause of women. In 1977, the life of Rajasthani *zenana* was brought into light by Rama Mehta’s *Inside the Haveli*, and the year 1979 marked the publication of a feminist journal, *Manushi*. Attia Hosain’s *Sunlight on a Broken Column* gives a vivid account of pre-partition Lucknow. Laila’s aspiration to acquire education is killed by her grand father; Zahara is forced into marriage, while Nandi the servant girl enjoyed more liberty than upper class girls. These novels are reflective of the types of responsibilities imposed upon women to guard the honour of their families, where men are considered the masters of their own will. Women writers in India face a psychological clash between their devotion towards old Indian traditions and their need to break the old stereotypes. Choubey suggests:

... the new opportunity for education and employment, the emergence of new socio-economic models and the privileges of new and equal political rights for women are gradually altering the traditional notion of the role and the status of women in contemporary society. The *Sita* image was in for a jolt and as women’s sense of individuality matured *Sita*, and cleared the way for *Draupadi*. This paradigm shift may be seen in the novels of Nayantara Sehgal, Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande and more recently Arundhati Roy besides many contemporary women writers of Indian English Fiction. (Choubey)
Indian women writers in English had been innovative and balanced traditions with modernity. They attempted to redeem the dignity of women. The submersion of western culture with Indian traditions created a shift to women seeking independent identities. The post-colonial writings of the Indian diaspora narrate the complex experience of migration, and encompass both cultural hybridization and assimilation on one hand and lingering nostalgia and cultural alienation on the other. There might be differences among various literary traditions of Indian diasporic writings but their historical background connects them altogether. The frequent occurrence of India resonates in almost all the works of diasporas. Identity crisis, personal loss, sense of alienation etc. are the prevailing themes. Anita Desai, Kamala Markandaya, Bharati Mukherji, Jhumpa Lahiri, Kiran Desai are well-known Indian diasporic women writers who have attained fame throughout the world. The Nowhere Man portrays the lack of belonging of immigrants in a foreign culture and the existing racism in England; Nayantara Sehgal’s This Time of Morning deals with identity dilemma; Bharati Mukherji’s The Tiger’s Daughter takes into account the sense of alienation and loss of cultural identity through repatriation, while Anita Desai’s Clear Light of the Day reflects the importance of family and home. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni in The Mistress of Spices (1997), uses magic and realism in her novels. Anuradha Marwah Roy’s Idol Love (1999) takes on fantasy and surrealism, and presents the image of an Indian dystopia of the twenty-first century.

Before the rise of novels, several women writers composed songs, short stories and short plays. Story-telling is the old age tradition particularly associated with women, who in their leisure used to sit together and tell tales in the form of legends, myths, fables, folk tales and fairy tales. Legends often have a regional association. They are connected with a particular event or person and often convey a religious message. The roots of legends lie in a particular time and are associated to a particular place. They may either be passed on verbally or through writing. Unlike folk tales, legends do not have an orderly outline.

A myth is an old story that may not necessarily be true. It attempts to elucidate and organize the world through narrative. It often endeavours to explain the forces of nature. The gods and goddesses are connected with human world. Myths are based upon religious traditions which are difficult to understand for a listener, unfamiliar with their traditions. Fables are short stories that instruct their readers/listeners about
the patterns of human behaviour. They provide morals that are presented sometimes as maxims. The characters presented in fables are talking beasts who have human emotions and feelings. Aesop and La Fontaine are renowned fabulists who have survived down the ages.

Folktales grow out of the oral custom of story-telling. They are not the work of a single writer but rather the labour of corporate authors as each teller makes personal changes to suit his/her personality and spectators. Like fables, folktales also have animal characters, but with the accompaniment of human beings. Hans Christian Anderson, Oscar Wilde, John Ruskin etc. extracted material from classical folktales in order to write original fairytales. The literary fairytales often use the pattern of traditional folktales. A folktale that contains “fairies, elves, trolls, dwarfs, giants and other imaginary creatures” (Folktales), is usually considered as a fairytale. Fairytales have elements of magic and enchantment. They are often stories about royalty, kings and queens, rather than common folk. Thus the terms folktales and fairy tales may be used interchangeably.

Feminist fairy tales are different from traditional fairy tales in many ways. Scholarly research committed to feminist issues in short stories and fairy tale studies initiated in 1970 and was pushed forth by the second wave feminist movement. This does not mean that the function of fairy tale in socio-cultural discourse related to gender identity has not been acknowledged earlier. Consciousness of the fairy tales as a chief site for affirming and destabilizing ideas of gender is obvious throughout the genre’s history. The women writers of France during the 17th and 18th centuries identified the fairy tale as a genre with gender and sexuality and experimented upon the inversion of the conservative gender role presented in the old and traditional fairy tales. In the 18th and 19th century, German women writers such as Benedikte Naubert, Bettina Von Arnim and Gisela Von Arnim acknowledged the primarily male point of view that distinguished prominent fairy tale publications, particularly those by Johann Carl August Musaus and the Brothers Grimm, and deliberately confronted these compilations by generating a female viewpoint and de-establishing the widely read male counterparts. In 19th C England, women writers such as Bronte sisters and Jane Austen reacted to the construction of gender in classical fairy tales after applying these broadly popular tales in their novels. The Victorian writers created new genre of tales complicitly for gender ideology. Jean Ingelow, Christina Rossetti and Juliana Horatia Erving got into inter-textual discussion with the fairy tales of male
contemporaries by writing their own texts in defense in which they would intentionally “rewrite, unrewrite and replace the male-authored constructions of femininity” (Haase preface viii). In the US, tales such as “Beauty and the Beast” and “Cinderella” were put forward by Louisa May Alcott in Little Women to revise conventional ideas about men, women and their relationship. Margaret Fuller invoked Cinderella in her feminist treatise of 1845, Woman in the Nineteenth Century, the first step to introduce the fairy tales into the public discussion of women’s rights.

For about three hundred years women have deliberately used fairy tales to question gender roles and to produce tales distinctly from those generated by men which in turn built a route for the younger generation women writers and also prefigured the feminist analysis expressed in fairy tale research since the 1970s. Numerous women writers have defied and rewritten previous texts constructed from the androcentric point of view and modified internal models to give voice to the marginalized. Prominent among such writers are Anne Sexton, Angela Carter, Margaret Atwood, Olga Browmas, Tanith Lee etc. (Haase Preface vii- ix).

Anne Sexton was born in Newton, Massachusetts in 1928 and spent most of her life near Boston. She suffered from a serious mental illness for much of her life. Her poetic career was encouraged by W. D. Snodgrass, her mentor. She wrote “The Double image”, to explore multigenerational relationship between mother and daughter. She met Maxine Kumin with whom she exchanged her artifacts and critiqued them. They together wrote four books for children. Her play Mercy Street was produced in 1969 after several years of revisions. She was a Pulitzer Prize winner of America, a fellow of the Royal Society of Literature.

Four Radio Plays. She published The Virago Book of Fairy Tales in 1990 before publishing her last novel, Wise Children, in 1991. Carter was intrigued by folk and fairy tales, which she both translated and reinterpreted. Carter is widely known for her fearless examination of tabooed topics such as pornography, sexual fetish, rape and incest. Carter’s work embraces lawlessness and deals with the question of marginalized. Two of Carter’s works, The Magic Toyshop and The Company of Wolves, were made into films, and many of her short stories have been recast for the stage.


Tanith Lee (1947), a British writer is one of the leading fantasy authors writing today. She has written over 50 novels and short story collections, among them the best-selling is Flat Earth series. She is also the author of a fantasy series, The Secret Books of Paradys. She has won the World Fantasy Award numerous times as well as the August Derleth Award.

Feminist fairy tales serves as guides for children to make them aware of the stereotypical fixation of gender roles, unequal power distribution, racial aspects, oppression and much more. In “Some Day My Prince Will Come: Female Acculturation through the Fairy Tale”, Marcia K. Lieberman gives the brief overview of feminist fairy tales and remarks:

Among other things, these tales present a picture of sexual roles, behaviour and psychology, and a way of predicting outcome or fate
according to sex, which is important because of the intense interest that children take in 'endings'; they always want to know how things will 'turn out'. (187)

The mode of fantasy is used by the feminist fairy tale writers for reconstruction processes. The term 'fantasy' is as primitive as the fictional utopias (an ideal world that does not exist in reality but only in imaginations), and Swift's Gulliver Travels (1726) in its satiric form is the presentation of bizarre world. Animal fantasy with animals personified, mythicizing and demythicizing along with magic on one hand and technology on the other are the basic components of feminist fairy tales. The writers also experiment upon Science Fiction assisted with fantasy that represents imagined reality completely diverse in its nature and performance from the ordinary real world:

Often the setting is another planet, or this earth projected into the future, or an imagined parallel universe... an explicit attempt is made to render plausible the fictional world by reference to known or imagined scientific principles, or to a projected advance in technology, or to a drastic change in the organization of society. (Abrams 278-79)

In the mid-nineteenth century, more women started to write in English in the Indian sub-continent. With the passage of time, English literature has witnessed several changes in the writing patterns. Many collections of short stories and anthologies of works by Indian women around the world have appeared, such as Truth Tales (1986), Truth Tales 2: The Slate of Life (1990) edited by Kali For Women, In Other Words: New Writing by Indian Women (1992) by Uravashi Butalia and Ritu Menon, Right of Way (1988), Flaming Spirit (1994) by K. V. Dominic, and The Inner Courtyard (1990) by Lakshmi Holmstorm. They also re-interpreted mythologies that are produced by using new symbols and subverting the canonic versions. Indian women writers have also incorporated recurring female experiences in their writings which affected the cultural and language patterns of Indian literature, and brought a stylized pattern in the whole context of Indian writing. In the late 20th, and the 21st centuries, women's writing is considered as a powerful medium of modernism and feminist statement.

It is noteworthy that critics and literary world has paid more attention to many women writers, but ignored others who too are prolific, competent and worthy of success. Due to one or the other factor they have been marginalized and thus lag
behind to attain significant positions in literature. Some such writers are Jyoti Singh, Vimala Raina, Shakuntala Srinagesh, Abha Dawesar etc. Most of these are now beginning to realize their potential, and will go further in directions as yet unimagined. Like the former ones, they also have committed themselves to fictionalize women’s causes with a view to ameliorate their position and release them from the state of traditional servitude. The present thesis studies the work of one such writer Suniti Namjoshi who too has favourably responded to the changing social, political, sexual and psychological realities of subalterns and the marginalized and has questioned their position in the androcentric patriarchal domain.

Born in Bombay, India, in the year 1941, in an elite Hindu family, Namjoshi lost her father, Captain Manohar Vinayak Namjoshi- a senior test pilot in the year 1953 in a plane crash, at the age of 12. Her mother, Sarojini Naik Nimbalkar belonged to the princely states of Phalton, Maharashtra, India. Namjoshi acquired her early education in an American boarding school in the north of India and later was sent to Rishi Valley School somewhere in the south of the Indian sub-continent. From the University of Pune she obtained her graduate and post-graduate degrees in English Literature in the year 1961 and 1963 respectively. For a year she taught as a lecturer at Fergusson College, Pune and in 1964 was selected in the Indian Administrative Service. It was after she joined the IAS, she took up writing verse. She got her master’s degree in Public Administration at the University of Missouri in America after taking leave from the government of India in 1968, and in 1969, resigned from the IAS and attained her doctorate degree on the Cantos of Ezra Pound, at Mc Gill University, Montreal, Canada (1969- 1972). From 1972 till 1989, she lectured at Scarborough College, University of Toronto. It was during a sabbatical in 1978-79 that Namjoshi went to England and spent time in London and also at Cambridge and came across to the evolving feminist and gay liberation movements. She discovered other feminists with whom she shared her thoughts, doubts and visions. In Because of India, she particularly acknowledges the impact of one of Christine Donald, a poet and activist, and due to her influence she came to understand the complexity of radical feminist thought and movement. This was the time of her political development. Namjoshi herself explains in Because of India that the other women’s defense of her shamed her. She thus joined the feminist groups and appeared explicitly in print.
Since then, Namjoshi has been writing fables, poetry, prose, children's stories etc. about power, inequality, oppression and discrimination. She is best known as a fabulist and her work encompasses issues such as gender, sexual orientation, unequal power distribution, cultural identity, human and animal rights. She takes into consideration the construction of gender identities in an androcentric society and also explores the position of lesbian women on the margins of the compulsory heterosexual order. Her writings reflect the multiple attributes of a post-modern, radical-lesbian feminist encapsulated in Eco-feminist and the Third World feminist aspects. She is the first Indian woman diasporic writer who is known as the out of the closet lesbian. She is of the view that one's sexuality is one's own personal choice and that compulsory heteronormativity is an oppressed social construction that leads women to subordinate men (Vijayasree 26). Due to the ethical and cultural values of India and the dignity of her family, it was not possible for her to express herself openly as a lesbian writer for in a lesbian's development the moment of open declaration of one's sexuality before one's family is a crucial aspect of evolution. Thus she left India and settled in the West. As reflected in Goja; An Autobiographical Myth, her writing reflects the notion of homophobia, pain and existential dilemma of a lesbian.

As Namjoshi has lived in India, America, Canada, England and Australia, her stories and fables are drawn from several cultures. She is also a re-visionist myth maker whose corpus is marked with, fantasy, inter-textuality and allusions, and is counted among prolific feminist fairy tale writers and fabulists, and carries a noticeable resemblance to Angela Carter and Margaret Atwood in terms of subject matter and creativity. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar in The Mad Woman in the Attic analyze the development of women's writing as their emergence from the shadows of men. It's a coming of age experience for the writer as woman. They write:

A woman writer is engaged at another level with assaulting and revising, deconstructing and reconstructing those images of women inherited from male literature, especially the paradigmatic polarities of angels and monsters. (5)

Being a diasporic writer she weaves her work with nostalgia and autobiographical elements. She suffers from displacement and alienation for being a woman of colour, a lesbian and a Hindu in a male-dominated, heterosexual, Christian and Western world. Her work reflects the experiences that she herself had undergone
during her life and provides her writings a self-referential stroke. Her Indianness is apparent in her collection in which she uses Western myths and legends alongside Indian and Eastern mythologies and anecdotes. Her canvas is quite broad and encompasses the tales from *Panchatantra* and *Jataka, Arabian Nights*, Grimm Brothers, Hans Anderson as well as Hindu and Christian mythologies. She applies animal fantasy and builds utopian/dystopian worlds and science fictions. As Vijayasree points out:

Her strength as a fabulist lies in crafting fantastic and farcical situations. She creates strange ‘Looking Glass Countries’ where things happen in an apparently bizarre fashion, but reveal interesting patterns on a closer analysis. All fiction is in some sense fantasy in that it is an imaginative construction, but the pervasive use of fantasy as an organizing principle and mode of perception as in the case of Namjoshi’s work suggests an overwhelming need for imaginative release from objective reality. (25-6)

Like Atwood and Carter, Namjoshi uses gothic elements along with magic and miracles in order to mesmerize and enchant the readers. Basically she is a poet, her fiction is not only marked in prose but in verse as well. She is a non-conformist who not only defies societal norms but also regulations and standards of literary genre.

Namjoshi’s literary career began with the publication of her first book of poems entitled *Poems* published in 1967 by P. Lal of Writers Workshop, Calcutta. She translated some poems from old Marathi into English during this period with her grandmother, Lekshmi Devi Naik Nimbalkar’s and her mother’s assistance, which got published as *Poems of Govindagraj* in Calcutta, Writer’s Workshop, 1968. Another two anthologies of poems, *More Poems* and *Cyclone in Pakistan* came out in 1971 in which she merges keen insights into personal sentiments with the evaluation of sociocultural foundations and systems. Namjoshi linked her poetic success with the publication of *The Jackass and the Lady* (1980) when she came out of the closet and established her position as a lesbian feminist. In this collection she laid open her sexuality and sexual preferences to her readers and thus her most powerful verses are found in this collection. Her next collection of poems *The Authentic Lie* published in 1982 is centered on the theme of death and metaphysics. This collection consists of poems related to Namjoshi’s grief at losing her father and is autobiographical in
nature. Later in the year 1986, her collection of poems is published in collaboration with Gillian Hanscombe entitled *Flesh and Paper* by Ragweed publication, Toronto, Canada. It is in the year 1984 that the writer met Hanscombe at the First International Feminist Book Fair in London. Even after coming back to Canada, they remained in touch and later exchanged poetry, gradually which became a manuscript and acquired the shape of the compilation *Flesh and Paper*. Gillian Hanscombe is currently Namjoshi’s partner with whom she lives in Devon, England. Another set of poems, *Sycorax* published by Penguin, India, 2005 is an elegy which is written in appraisal of a bloody-minded old woman. The figure of Caliban’s mother, Sycorax, is taken from Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*. Sycorax is still alive and returns to the island to die after Prospero and others have left.

It was after more than a decade’s poetic work that she turned to fiction writing. She was always allured by fables and fairy tales. Her awareness of the harmful nature of the apparently harmless children’s stories led her to distort and deconstruct the conventional fixed notions associated with gender discrimination and other oppressions created by them. She hit the canonical text *The Tempest* by Shakespeare for its colonial relations by creating a female Caliban and attacking gender and racial mistreatment in her work *From the Bedside Book of Nightmares*. She produced her first work of fiction in the form of fables in 1979 which was later published by Sheba Feminist Publishers, London in the year 1981 entitled *Feminist Fables*. As the title indicates, the collection not only takes into account the issues of women’s oppression but the subalterns in general. She remarks in *The Fabulous Feminist: A Suniti Namjoshi Reader*:

> ...the word ‘feminist’ has become almost a bad word in the west. It has the disadvantage of making the careless reader think that the fables are concerned only with what happens to women. The fable form should make it clear that they question what happens to anyone whenever there’s an imbalance of power. (2)

Another work on fiction is a novella entitled *The Conversations of Cow* published by Women’s Press, London, in the year 1985. The book was basically written as bedtime reading for Christine Donald, her friend and a feminist who was the first to introduce her to the roots of feminism. Namjoshi does not think of this work as a book but only as ‘a private bit of writing to amuse’. (*The Fabulous Feminist* 53) The novella is written from the point of view of an Indian and is self referential. It
describes the journeys of Suniti, an expatriate lesbian of India, and a Brahmini Cow-Bhadravati with a focus on race and questions the stereotypical belief about gender and identity.

*The Blue Donkey Fables* published by Women's Press London, 1986 is a collection of fables with 'Blue Donkey' as the central character. Namjoshi was always fascinated by Marc Chagall's paintings, and the creation of the 'Blue Donkey' is the out come of Chagall's production of the blue donkey with the bright red bridge and the vase of flowers as the image of the blue donkey lingered in the writer's mind to write more fables.

*The Mothers of Maya Diip* was also published by Women's Press, London, in 1991. The story is set up on an island of imagination where ‘matriarchy bloomed’ openly. The novel portrays the three different worlds- Mayadiip, Ashagad and Paradise in which she discusses multiple sexual identities and multiple cultural traditions. The writer provides ‘Ashagad’ the landscape of Western Maharashtra, her native place.

*Saint Suniti and the Dragon* was first published by Spinifex Press, Melbourne in 1993. The book consists of two parts- *Saint Suniti and the Dragon* and *The Solidarity Fables*. The first part is a novella while the second is the collection of fables. The first is the projection of the world in a mess, and the effort to be good persists in all. The protagonist, Saint Suniti is an ordinary human being who desires to be good but not too good as the idea conveyed later is too difficult to be fulfilled.

*Building Babel* is published in the year 1996 by Spinifex Press, Melbourne. The text deals with the building of a new culture free of gender and sexual biases, and has located its last chapter on the internet. The hypertext links are open for the readers to contribute to *Building Babel* so as to provide eternity to culture building.

*Goja: An Autobiographical Myth* (Spinifex, 2000) is Namjoshi’s attempt to explore the link between language and experience. In the Preface of the book Namjoshi writes:

This account is autobiographical in that my experience is all I have. It’s fictional since any version manipulates facts. And it’s mythical, because it’s by making patterns that I make sense of all I have.

This book ranges from story-telling to interrogation, from description to poetry, from conversation and dialogue to recollection and nostalgia. It takes the readers to the writer's childhood and brings them back to her adult life.
For children’s Literature, Namjoshi has written twelve books of fairy tales in the set of three with four tales in each set. Her first book for children *Aditi and the One-Eyed Monkey* was published by Beacon Press in the year 1988. Namjoshi wrote the book for her niece Aditi, and made her the protagonist of the story. Soon after the children of Blue Gate Fields Junior School, London had read the tale as a part of a story telling session in Tower Hamlets and had wanted Aditi and her friends to come to London, Namjoshi wrote her second book, *Aditi and the Thames Dragon* (Chennai, India: Tulika Press, 2002). The third book in this series, *Aditi and the Marine Sage* (Chennai, India: Tulika Press, 2004) is set on the Great Barrier Reef in Australia, while her fourth book, *Aditi and the Techno Sage* is set on a lake in Canada. These four books are compiled in a one set- *Aditi Adventures I* named as *Unlikely Friends*. Later more two sets of four tales each- *Aditi Adventures II and III* entitled *Unexpected Monsters* and *Heroes* respectively were published by Tulika Press, India. However, the tales are written for children but they also bear the highly philosophical notions of feminism worthy of being read by adults. These tales are feminist fairy tales which distort and dismantle the myths, biases and stereotypes constructed by patriarchy related to sex, gender and identity. The tales also deal with the raising of children and help the latter to overcome their oedipal conflicts. Painted with fantasy and magic along with science and technology the tales are the perfect examples of utopia and dystopia.

Apart from her collection of poems *Because of India*, her autobiographical account *Goja* and her compilation of poems *Flesh and Papers*, written in collaboration with Gillian Hanscombe, Namjoshi has also published her reader *The Fabulous Feminist* (2012) by Zubaan publication, Delhi, India, which along with her formerly mentioned work provide a vivid description of her literary and personal account. With Hanscombe, she has also experimented upon a play *Kaliyug: Circles of Paradise* which was first performed in 1993 written for Pan Project. Her recently published prose work that is also a memoir *Suki* (2013 by Penguin Books India) is a dialogue between Suki- a cat and her owner (the author herself). Namjoshi is fascinated by animals. Suki is a pet of the writer whom the former lost in the year 1997. For Namjoshi, Suki was a friend and a companion, thus to give a tribute to it, she decides to write a memoir:

To Suki—a sulky, silky feline who believes she is a goddess—her owner is simply her ‘high priestess’, there to do her bidding. To
Suniti—a writer, poet, fabulist and feminist icon—Suki is 'a stroppy cat who talks too much'. But as they discuss the merits of vegetarianism, or the meaning of happiness, or war, or morality or any topic under the sun, it soon becomes clear that the bond between human and animal is a deep, complex and loving one. *(Suki)*

Suki is not only a memoir but a philosophical work expressive of Namjoshi's art of fantasizing and exploring an innovative connection between animal and human world.

The present research deals with feminist perspectives in the fiction of Namjoshi. The first chapter is the introduction, the second and third chapters analyse her fables and novels in a chronological order i.e. *Feminist Fables* (1981), *The Conversations of Cow* (1985) and *The Blue Donkey Fables* (1988) in one, and *The Mothers of Maya Diip* (1989), *Saint Suniti and the Dragon* (1993), *Building Babel* (1996) and *Goja* (2000) in the other, while the fourth chapter takes into account children's literature and deals with her fairy tales *Aditi Adventures I, II and III*, and the fifth is the conclusion. The chronological order of the division of chapters trace the course of development in Namjoshi's thought process and literary career.
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Chapter Two

"Identity is Fluid"

A Study of Feminist Fables, The Conversations of Cow and The Blue Donkey Fables
**Feminist Fables**

Power, whether political, social or economic has the ability to get hold of and rule over not only individuals but entire communities. Power, if equally distributed, can build an equitable universe. However its misuse can cause destruction and decay. Feminist discourse takes into consideration the question of unequal power distribution among the sexes, races, classes and genders leading to suppression and oppression of the marginalized. Males have domination over their female counterparts, whites over blacks, rich over poor, heterosexuals over homosexuals, and man over the environment.

With the issue of equality as its primary concern Feminist Fables (FF) also includes other centres of power such as race, class and gender. Feminist Fables discusses feminism in its broadest sense and questions the unequal distribution and imbalance of power prevailing among different social groups. Suniti Namjoshi, in an interview with C. Vijayasree, comments:

In Feminist Fables I wasn’t so much concerned with making feminist statements as with using the form to understand the imbalance of power and to question it... And it’s worth considering that feminism in its broadest sense questions the roles the powerful assign to themselves in relation to relatively powerless. (Vijayasree 178-79)

The original title of this collection was ‘The Monkey and the Crocodiles’. Sheba Feminist Publishers brought out the book in 1981 and changed the title to Feminist Fables. Namjoshi in her book The Fabulous Feminist (2012) argues that often the word ‘feminist’ has a narrow connotation ‘of being firmly feminist’, and a casual reader may mistakenly think that it is only associated with the cause of women. Namjoshi is of the view that the existing title has a disadvantage as she says, ‘the fable form should make it clear that they question what happens to anyone whenever there’s an imbalance of power’. (2)

In Feminist Fables Namjoshi encompasses a large variety of experiences of the subordinated and the marginalized, and fictionalizes their cause with a view to upgrade their position and release them from traditional enslavement. Her technique of presenting ideas through rewriting fairy tales, fables, Classical Greek and Indian mythology, and inter textual references enriched with allusions invokes the child
within the adult. Fairy tales, fables and short stories in her work are highly philosophical, enriched with lofty and elevated ideas. Vijayasree points out:

Namjoshi makes clever use of Anderson’s tales, Panchatantra stories, Aesop’s fables and other texts as intertexts to deconstruct the patriarchal world order surely ensconced in these seemingly innocent stories on which generations of children are raised. Even nursery rhymes and songs are re-viewed here from a feminist perspective...

(75-76)

These stories no longer remain merely a source of entertainment, where the reader can lose himself/ herself in their spell-binding effect. Instead they provide a discourse about redeeming the subjugated and marginalized.

All hundred Feminist Fables are narratives about how women have been marginalized and rejected. Preference for a male child, female infanticide, unequal education opportunities, suppression of women’s ambitions, feeding young girls on patriarchal dreams of marriage, compulsory heterosexuality etc. form major discussions. Oppression by husbands and their families, prohibition of economic independence, compulsion of child bearing and child rearing, rape, molestation and homophobia occur all through the volume.

Namjoshi’s fables range from ancient to modern, such as ‘Trogloodyte’ (FF 63), ‘The Giantess’ (FF 29) and ‘Amazon’ (FF 110); from tribes and villages to big cities and metropolitans; from the third world, such as ‘Sheherezade’ (FF 4), ‘From the Panchatantra’ (FF 1) to the first world, such as ‘The Derbyshire Fish’ (FF 84), ‘Liberation’ (FF 76); from house wives to working women, ‘Heart’ (FF 93), ‘Plankton’ (FF 112) and ‘Experts’ (FF 90); from ancient to modern; from poor to elite, such as ‘The Debt’ (FF 56) and ‘The Dower’ (FF 88); from passive and submissive to active and powerful women as, ‘The Princess’ (FF 5) and ‘Broadcast Live’ (FF 58), from heterosexuals to homosexuals and so on. She has a broad canvas of feminism that is not confined to one particular place or time. She breaks all the boundaries and gains a universal voice.

She has analyzed the effects of women’s oppression at multiple levels such as reproduction, education, employment, self determination, political voice, body image, working to make it clear how these are part of a larger system of oppression. ‘Local History’ (FF 50) and ‘The Dower’ (FF 88), deal with the coming of misfortunes due to a female child; ‘From the Panchatantra’ (FF 1), takes into account the desire of a
Brahmin for a son; ‘Of Spiders’ (FF 57), deals with the disapproval of the abilities of a female child; female characters in ‘The Lesson’ (FF 8), ‘Thorn Rose’ (FF 10), ‘The Little Prince’ (FF 15), ‘Bird Woman’ (FF 16), ‘The Gods’ (FF 35), are rendered voiceless when they dared to speak against the conventions of society. They were asked to hold their tongues and clip their wings when they desired to fly high.

Through old fairy tales, girls are fed on dreams of Prince Charming. They have been allowed to be the princesses and queens but not to rule. The girl in ‘The Lesson’ (FF 8), was asked to hold her tongue when she desired to be an emperor; the little princess in ‘Thorn Rose’ (FF 10), was defeated and punished when she challenged her brother to combat; the Snow Maiden in ‘Blood’ (FF 33), ate snow to maintain her beauty as she had been waiting for Prince Charming to come and marry her; Rapunzel in ‘Rescued’ (FF 87), dreamt of a prince who would rescue her and then marry her. Anne Susan Koshi comments on Namjoshi’s use of language. In her book The Short Fiction of Angela Carter, Margaret Atwood and Suniti Namjoshi: A Study in Feminism and Fairy Tales (2010), Koshi argues that she has … “adopted a distinct moral language, one that emphasizes concern for others, responsibility, care and obligation”, (223) as she has written many fables from patriarchal view point. But apart from conventional stereotypical girls, Namjoshi also gives the accounts of taboo breakers who rejected the old notion of marriage. Their language is rebellious and their attitudes are challenging. They chose their partners on the basis of their own preference. The little princess in ‘Svayamvara’ (FF 105), decided to marry a man who could beat her in whistling; the princess in ‘Perseus and Andromeda’ (FF 47), preferred to go with the dragon rather than the prince who was incompetent and incapable of saving her life; Atlanta in ‘The Runner’ (FF 7), tried to escape marriage as she was the fastest runner in Attica and no one could beat her. On one hand there are weak and weeping women who submit and surrender themselves to patriarchy, while on the other we see those who have the ability to stand against male hegemony and take their own decisions and celebrate their womanhood. The Snow Maiden in ‘Blood’ (FF 33), cried a good deal when her husband doubted her chastity; the girl in ‘Misfit’ (FF 69), was a misfit in the patriarchal atmosphere of Heaven, and gave in to despair and isolation. The other fables like ‘Dragon Slayers’ (FF 75), ‘Logic’ (FF 71), ‘Broadcast Live’ (FF 58), ‘The Snake and the Mongoose’ (FF 37), ‘The Woman Who Lived on the Beach’ (FF 114), ‘Jack Three’s Luck’ (FF 101), ‘And Then What Happened?’ (FF 118), portray liberated women who have free will, raise their voice,
go beyond the conventions of society, and reject the idea of being dutiful and obedient.

Patriarchy questioned the intelligence of women. Rousseau in his work *Emile*, subtitled 'Of Education', has discriminated between the type of education provided to men and women. For him women are sensitive, lack intelligence and hence cannot survive in the public sphere. Their job is child bearing and child rearing, looking after the home and hearth and to be modest and chaste. Thus they should be educated accordingly. He associates men with rationality and prudence and considers them as capable and active beings. Hence their education must suit their capabilities.

In *Feminist Fables*, Namjoshi rejects this bias and tries to redeem the dignity of women. 'Owl' (FF129), 'The Doll' (FF 108), 'For Adrienne Rich' (FF 70), 'The Mouse and the Lion' (FF 97), all these fables present women as rational beings. Other fables like, 'Anthropoi' (FF 9), highlight the abilities of women challenged by patriarchy, "it is only after the domestication of women, the civilization of men advanced apace" (FF 9). She attempts to uplift the status of women by inverting the conservative gender roles and presenting the brave male literary characters as inferior and weak to their female counterparts. 'In the Forest' (FF 95), the distorted version of the fairy tale 'Hansel and Gretel', depicts the character of Gretel as stronger than her brother’s, "Gretel takes charge. She is braver and wiser." In ‘The Three Bears’ (FF 39), Goldilocks has all the qualities of a girl, "Goldilocks cries...He makes such a sweet and good little girl". Namjoshi also uses the inversion of situations. In ‘The Little Prince’ (FF 15), the step mother brought up her daughter without curbing her spirit, and her step son like a woman, "shy, docile and gentle", as she wanted the girl to reign alone. The little princess of the ‘Thorn Rose’ (FF 10), is not ‘lady-like and wore men’s clothes’. She challenged her brother to a fight. Namjoshi uses the techniques of inversion and role reversal to convey that sex differentiation is just biological, and we behave the way we are trained. She adheres to the views of Simone de Beauvoir, "one is not born but rather becomes a woman". Goldilocks and the little prince are born male, but their upbringing makes them conventionally feminine. It also illustrates that sex and gender are distinct from each other. Gender is the result of social institutions and is a learned behavior, whereas sex is a biological category. Anne Fausto Sterling argues:

Feminists argued that although men’s and women’s bodies serve different reproductive functions, few other sex differences come with
the territory, unchangeable by life’s vicissitudes. If girls couldn’t learn math as easily, the problem wasn’t built into their brains. The difficulty resulted from gender norms—different expectations and opportunities for boys and girls. Having a penis, rather than a vagina is a sex difference. Boys’ performing better than girls in math exams is a gender difference. (Mc Hugh 49)

Sunita Namjoshi being a post- independence and a post- modern Anglo- Indian writer experiments boldly not only with theme but also incorporates tabooed subject matters in her work. She simultaneously takes up several cultural, social and political issues. Her characters evoke a constant discussion on social values and symbolize life and growth as well as decay and death. As a true feminist, she gives voice to the voiceless and makes visible the invisible. People who have been marginalized worldwide and remained mute find their identity in these fables. Her works reverberate with feelings for the suppressed, oppressed and distressed and take into account the lives of women who have been disregarded and unnoticed.

In her later fables we come across women who are victims of male abuse. They are bullied, made slaves, beaten, molested and raped. ‘No Frog in Her Right Mind’ (FF 54), ‘The Monkey and the Crocodiles’ (FF 26), ‘The Crocodile’ (FF 44), ‘The Oyster Child’ (FF 78), ‘Further Adventures of the One Eyed Monkey’ (FF 79), ‘Complaint’ (FF 85), ‘The Amazon’ (FF 110), ‘Philomel’ (FF 102), ‘The Fabulous Beast’ (FF 22), ‘Sheherezade’ (FF 42), portray men as the suppressors and women as the suppressed.

An androcentric society considers women either as moral beings, or so weak that they must be subjected to the superior control of men. In her post-marital life a woman is treated by her husband like a slave, who wants her to act according to his own desire. If she fails to behave accordingly, she is punished. ‘A Room of One’s Own’ (FF 64), ‘And Then What Happened?’ (FF 118), ‘The Fisherman’s Wife’ (FF 55), and ‘The Milk White Mare’ (FF 25) deal with different aspects of the issue. Women are not even allowed to chose their profession. They are abused, looked upon with disgust, and are considered a curse in fables such as, ‘The Ugly One’ (FF14), ‘Legend’ (FF 31), and ‘Of Mermaids’ (FF 32). The protagonists are ridiculed for being the prostitutes.

Women’s efforts at home have been ignored by the patriarchy. Roberts E. Dorothy illustrates that “women’s labour in the homes was compensated by the
ideological rewards of motherhood, rather than by economic enumeration or the opportunity for self-determination." (10) Namjoshi discards this patriarchal bias and criticizes women who give up their lives in the service of their families and yet have no security. The woman in 'Heart' (FF 93), is a conventional mother who works the entire day for the family's comfort, but has no economic security after her husband's death. 'The Giantess' (FF 29), who revolted against the stereotypical role of a mother in a male dominated society, represents the views of Namjoshi herself. Her decision to retire after the family grew up represents the breaking of shackles.

Suniti Namjoshi is a radical lesbian feminist. She critiques heterosexuality as it leads to dominance and is the structural oppression of LGBT (lesbian, gay bisexual and transgendered) people. Social institutions discriminate against gays and lesbians. Social practices continue to permit sarcasm and harassment at the expense of LGBT people. In her book Lesbian Ethics (1989) Sarah Hoagland, a US feminist says:

Heterosexualism is men dominating and de-skilling women in any number of forms; from outright attack to paternalistic care, and women devaluing (of necessity) female bonding as well as finding inherent conflicts between commitment and autonomy, and consequently valuing ethics of dependence. Heterosexualism is a way of living (which actual practitioners exhibit to a greater or lesser degree) that normalizes the dominance of one person in a relationship and the subordination of another. As a result it undermines female agency. (McHugh 60-61)

Favouring the slogan, 'woman identified woman', Namjoshi argues that the category of lesbians unlike the category of straight women is free of dominance and violence as norms of behaviour are a part of the androcentric system. Straight women compromise with the assumption that heterosexual behaviour is the norm, biologically, socially and culturally, and that what is reckoned as sex, is penile-vaginal penetration, and that gays and lesbians cannot have real sex. In order to obtain the attention and love of men, and to marry and secure a bright future women try to retain their beauty by doing absurd things. Mary Wollstonecraft in her book A Vindication of the Rights of Women (1992) illustrates that it is a societal construct that:

women are told from their infancy, and taught by the examples of their mothers that a little knowledge of human weakness, justly termed
cunning, softness of temper, outward obedience, and a scrupulous attention to a puerile kind of propriety, will obtain for them the protection of man; and should they be beautiful, everything else is needless, for at least twenty years of their lives. (21)

The last statement makes it clear that in patriarchy, only 'beauty' can provide a bright and secure future to women. In radical feminism beauty has no place. It is an attribute desired by patriarchy. Many of Namjoshi’s stories also deal with these two contradictory elements i.e. beauty and ugliness.

Principles of beauty change across different cultures and times. There may be material penalties for not being beautiful and material gains for being beautiful. Clarke points out that, “many a contemporary women has lost front- desk job, or failed to get one, if she was too old, or too fat, or disabled, or just funny looking.” Namjoshi is of the view that women, themselves are responsible for such conditions prevailing in male dominated society. She uses satire as a weapon to mock and make fun of those who follow certain patriarchal notions. Namjoshi suggests that if women do not pursue wrong ideas they can acquire the strength to earn their own living without which independence is not possible. This can only be achieved through education. Snow Maiden in ‘Blood’ (FF 33), eats snow to retain her beauty; the dwarf in ‘Patience’ (FF 60), ‘trudged’ through the forest to find answers for her dwarfishism; the child in ‘The Confessions of a Short Person’ (FF 20), eats a lot of spinach to grow tall; the toad in ‘Jewel’ (FF 51), cries endlessly because she thought she was ugly.

*Feminist Fables* is didactic in purpose and sends out the message that women must come forward, raise their voices, grab their due from men and outdo men in order to achieve liberation and empowerment. They must recognize their secret powers by overthrowing long imposed restriction of patriarchy over them. Beauty and ugliness are part of the patriarchal ideology. De Clarke points out:

In patriarchy, smallness is feminine, cleanliness is feminine, a high voice is feminine, helplessness and cowardice, and correspondingly dependency and admiration for others are feminine... While women are expected to be beautiful, women’s genitals are said to be ugly and unclean. Birth is said to be ugly, pregnant women are ugly, vaginal order (even when perfectly healthy) is ugly. The functional parts of a mature woman’s body, sexual and reproductive both, are called as ugly as any other sign of her maturity.
If all the obscure and hidden features of a woman’s body are ugly, then how could patriarchy expect them to be beautiful? Sometimes, the ugly, disabled and deformed humanity defects are rejected by society both sexually and socially. This category of people gets frustrated and finds solace in the company of those who accept them as they are. In Namjoshī we see lesbians longing and desiring social space where nobody can question and demand explanations and issue rejections. As a couple of the same gender; one partner is womanly, while the other possesses masculine qualities. Namjoshī’s unconventional women also possess certain masculine traits. A dissertation submitted to the University of Southern California entitled, ‘Ugly Dykes’ by Yetta Howard, claims, “Dykes are equated with a lesbian masculinity that is specifically working class...” Howard further gives the meaning of another category, that is, a ‘bull dyke’ as a “female homosexual who behaves in an extremely masculine fashion, resembling a working class male.” These women disregard all the intimate patriarchal biases surrounding women. The dykes often hide their identity as they have the fear of being disapproved by the society. The ugly creature in ‘The Ugly One’ (FF 14), the beast in ‘A Moral Tale’ (FF 21), woman in ‘A Quiet Life’ (FF 48), the brutish hairy woman in ‘Trogloodyte’ (FF 63), women in ‘The Badge Wearing Dyke’ (FF 11), all became the victims of social biases.

Namjoshī explores the role of a man in the life of a woman. She questions the security conventionally associated with a heterosexual relationship. ‘Her Mother’s daughter’ (FF 99), deals with a girl who wants to change things by not being dependent on men. She does not want her father to rule and dominate their life, and ends her argument by saying, “... women only exist in relation to men and that men are primary?” Her mother is submissive and fears change as it is dangerous. Vijayasree talks about the mother- daughter relationship suggested by Namjoshī:

It is the appropriation of woman into her husband’s patriarchal family that effects a separation between mother and daughter. Unlike the heterosexual daughter, the lesbian daughter retains or reclaims the mother- daughter bond, paying no homage to male domination ownership of her body. (85)

The elder lizard in ‘The Saurian Chronicles’ (FF 17), conveys that men are the root of the sufferings of women, and if men will start depending on themselves economically, socially and sexually all their miseries will be removed. The heterosexual relation is purely economic, while female- female relationship proved to
be surprisingly beyond sexual coherence. According to Namjoshi, this relationship is unpredictably dipped in unspeakable pleasure. She says that the relationship of a man with a woman is that of master and slave. Men want to trap women and get their possession, extract maximum pleasure and make them act according to their own desire. The frog in ‘No Frog in her Right Mind’ (FF54), has been imprisoned by the prince and is treated like a slave. “When he dines at table, she is tied to his cup. He takes her to his room and puts her in a jar.”

Women have no identity of their own. They are treated as the objects of sex by the patriarchy. The Caliph in ‘Sheherezade’ (FF 42), tries to extract maximum pleasure from the princess and the other women of the palace. The woman in ‘The Milk White Mare’ (FF 25) has been rejected by her husband and family as she was unchaste; but becomes the object of dispute when she transforms into a beautiful mare through some magical powers. Her transactions with the Caliph expose that the life of a woman is a puzzle. It gains significance only when she is identified with a man. The farmer in ‘The Sow’ (FF 116), loves the sow yet he slaughters her.

Lesbianism is a result of alienation and dissatisfaction with institutions such as patriarchy and capitalism. Through her fables the writer tries to denaturalize heterosexuality and also conveys that men are not the essential components in the life of a woman. She places emphasis on women’s love for one another, and attempts to build a world away from patriarchy. Elsa Gidlow, a lesbian poet writes:

The lesbian personality manifests itself in independence of spirit, in willingness to take responsibility for oneself, to think for oneself, not to take ‘authorities’ and their diction on trust. It usually includes erotic attraction to women, although we know, there have been many women of lesbian personality who never had sexual relations with one another. What is strongly a part of the lesbian personality is loyalty and love of other woman. (Tandon 55)

Lesbians defy heteronormativity, and the regimes of what is normal. Everything goes against their will. They are disapproved and rejected everywhere. They are unhappy people, going through trials and tribulations. They are the victims of double jeopardy, oppressed not only for being women but also for being lesbians.

Favouring the homosexual aspect, Namjoshi wants a woman to listen to her heart and not to go according to the societal norms. The dyke in ‘The Wicked Witch’ (FF 40), is indifferent to the conventions of society and says, “I feel what I feel, what
difference does it make other people say they think I feel?' The woman in 'The Moon Shone On' (FF 45), is very passionate about her love for another woman and expresses it like a conventional lover. Sheherazade refuses the love of the Caliph and turns to her younger sister Dinarzade in 'For Adreinne Rich' (FF 70), as she does not want to be a slave of patriarchy. In 'The Sculptor' (FF 49), the sculptor tries to carve a man out of stone but each time it turns out to be a woman.

The writer goes deep into the psyche of a lesbian and reveals her inner fears and hesitations of getting exposed and rejected. On the one hand there are out- of- the closet lesbians, on the other there are women who are hesitant of expressing their sexuality. The lesbian in 'A Quiet Life' (FF 48), prefers to hide her identity and disguises herself as a fake woman as she is scared of being ridiculed. The women in 'The Friends' (FF 81), are unable to express their love for fear of the world. The writer has explored the historical background and a wide range of lesbian experiences. "The Cave fell in, the tribe disappeared", in 'Troglodyte' (FF 63), depicts the practice of removing all the records and evidences of lesbian existence. Even the literary characters, Viola and Olivia of a canonical text of Shakespeare's Twelfth Night have been projected through the reversal of situation in the fable 'I See What You Are' (FF 92). Olivia and Viola genuinely fall in love and develop an intimate relationship. The bird in 'The Babbling Bird' (FF 111), breathlessly complains about the miseries of being a lesbian. Namjoshi is a rebel who not only ridicules patriarchy but also religion. She mocks at gods and satirizes the norms of Nature constructed by them. Mary Daly, a white US feminist theologian in her earliest texts The Church and the Second Sex (1968) and Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation (1973), initiates an existentialist perspective, "women's subordination and oppression is directly a result of misogyny in Christianity." It is God who initiated the existence of man with a man- woman heterosexual relationship, that still prevails and has thus, became the natural and socio-cultural norm. (Hugh 24-25 Connecting this theory to religion in general, Namjoshi attacks gods and goddesses. Lord Vishnu in 'From the Panchatantra' (FF 1) and 'Further Adventures of One- Eyed Monkey' (FF 79), and the goddess in 'The Grace of the Goddess' (FF65) have not been able to provide justice to women. 'Ostriches' (FF 44), makes it clear that the law of Nature makes female animals follow their males and enjoy heterosexuality. 'Exegesis' (FF53), criticizes the Bible saying that reproduction is only possible after intercourse and that a woman is barren without a man as earth could not stand alone without the
“light giving sun... Man is at the centre. There are no human women”. The same patriarchy prevails in heaven in ‘Misfit’ (FF 69).

Namjoshi’s feminism, like Chandra Talpade Mohanty, is a borderless feminism. These borders are not geographical, but take into account all experiences of women across countries, races, classes or castes. Many of her fables deal with the issues of multiple marginalizations. ‘Happy Ending’ (FF 12), ‘The Female Swan’ (FF 18), ‘The Fox and The Stork’ (FF 73), ‘Red Fox and White Swan’ (FF 126), deal with racism. Men are better than women, heterosexuals have better social status, and whites have privileges over blacks. The comparison does not end here, it goes on with intrasexual discrimination where white lesbians are considered of higher value than the women of colour. Only the rich white males are safe of this curse in the whole world. The women of the Third World demanded their children as well as men be liberated, as their liberation is possible only when they will be relieved of economic crises and poverty. The women in ‘Next Time Around’ (FF 59) and ‘The Grace of the Goddess’ (FF 65), desire the entire human race to be free of all crises and evils.

Fables such as ‘Milk White Mare’ and ‘The Sow’ have animal names symbolizing women. Female domestic animals are used as slaves, tied up and tamed by men. Other animals remind us of conventional gendering as lion is male and mouse is female, monkey a female and crocodile a male, and babbling bird, mermaid and swan are females. There are other fables which discard this norm and present women as bold and powerful, for instance, snake is male and mongoose is female in ‘Snake and the Mongoose’ (FF 37). Some titles are ironical as ‘The Lesson’ (FF 8) is a lesson according to patriarchy, ‘A Moral Tale’ (FF 21), again is a moral propagated by the patriarchy, ‘The Fisherman’s Wife’ (FF 55), is subtitled as ‘The Foolish Feminist’. Other titles are abuses used for women as ‘Whore Bitch Slut Sow’ (FF 23), ‘The Giantess’ (FF 29).

Namjoshi’s corpus is marked with the intermingling of different feminist thoughts. In Feminist Fables we find an aspect of eco- feminism. Nancy Arden Mc Hugh in her book Feminist Philosophies A- Z (2007) gives reference of a French Feminist philosopher Francoise d’ Eaubonne, who argues that the environmental balance and the end of patriarchy are interconnected. According to her the increase in population and the balance of Nature is the outcome of patriarchal disfunctioning. (32- 33)
Some ecofeminists are of the view that women have a stronger physical, emotional and spiritual connection to nature and thus are most suited to ‘ethical interactions’ with the environment. McHugh refers to another philosopher, Karen Warren, who says, “there are important connections between the unjustified dominations of women, people of colour, children, and the poor and the unjustified domination of nature.” (32- 33) Daphne in ‘The Nymph’ (FF 4), transforms into green laurel; in ‘Exegesis’ (FF53), the earth is feminine and the sun symbolizes a male.

Being a radical lesbian feminist, Namjoshi wants to convey that gender oppression is the root cause of other forms of oppressions that function at all levels in a male dominated society, and that institutionalized heterosexuality is the root of patriarchy’s control of women. Thus a new political, economic and social foundation is needed to end the patriarchy’s oppression of women. The writer attempts to do so through her fables and fairy tales, as they are imaginative and are woven around a world of fantasy, while in the real world discrimination is a continuous process. So after taking all these issues and organizing them according to her own desires, she finds solace and satisfaction. But this does not mean that in doing so she tries to escape from the situation. Her distortion of the original myths and the fairy tales and the revisioning and rewriting them, is a means to question the conventional male biases about women.

**The Conversations of Cow**

*The Conversations of Cow* (CC), Namjoshi’s novella published in 1985, is dedicated to Christine Donald, a feminist friend. Bhadravati, the Brahmini lesbian cow, appears like a goddess to Suniti the protagonist. Named after the author, Suniti is concerned about the position of lesbians in a male-centred society. The powerful heterosexual hierarchy relegated such minorities to the margins. Impressed by the cow’s divinity, Suniti implores her to answer her questions, ‘What about our identities? Aren’t we being false to ourselves?’

*The Conversations of Cow*, like most of Namjoshi’s writing, takes into account the idea of liberation of women, particularly lesbians, and questions the gender stereotyping. It also deals with the aspect of race and quest for identity. Namjoshi uses the technique of self-reference as the protagonist is named after her. Suniti - the protagonist and Namjoshi – the writer are the mirror images of each other.
as, both of them are Hindu- Brahmin, women, Indian and lesbians. The first person narration provides the novella with an autobiographical note.

Suniti, a Hindu Brahmin from India meets Bhadravati, a Brahmin cow in Canada where both of them are immigrants. Guided by her Indian cultural heritage Suniti respects the cow and invites her to be her companion. Suniti finds comfort in the shared Indian identity. Conversations with Bhadravati help Suniti to resolve her instability, confusions and fragmentation.

Asian immigrants and other people of colour become the victims of racial discrimination in the West. Namjoshi’s experience of pain for being ridiculed on the question of race depicts Bhadravati and Suniti as sufferers. The Hereford Cows consider them inferior and mock their Eastern origins:

‘So, you’re both from India,’ says Lou- Ann. ‘That’s really great.’

‘Why is it great?’

‘Why, well, it just is, you know. You must tell us all about.’

‘It’s very nice,’ I say with deliberate inanity, which I think I intend to be slightly insulting, but they don’t notice. (CC 19)

Their names sound unusual and difficult to pronounce, so they shorten their names to ‘Sue and ‘Baddy’. The refusal of Suniti to use the nick name indicates her unwillingness to adjust and to distort her identity:

‘I’m Suniti,’ I say.

‘Su? What?’

I tell them again. They get it wrong.

‘Well, we’ll just call you Sue for short, just as we do Baddy here.’ Her real name is Bhadravati. I look at Cow, who looks away. Later she says to me, ‘Well, you have to adjust.’

But right then and there I say distinctly, ‘No, you will not call me Sue for short.’ (CC 18)

Suniti experiences alienation as the cows ignore her and talk only to Canadian Cows:

‘I had a curious dream too,’ I put in nervously. ‘About a Glyptodon... an extinct mammal... an early ancestor...

‘What did you eat?’ Baddy asks. No one is listening to me, even I am not listening. We are all waiting for Sybbie’s answer. (CC 21)

Feminism attempts to disrupt the patriarchal domination by erasing the boundaries between the centre and the margin. Through the agency of Indian and
Canadian Cows, Namjoshi highlights the internal contradictions within feminism. The changing social, cultural and sexual contexts make the feminine identity extremely flexible. Bhadravati tells Suniti "Identity is fluid." Suniti goes through mental trauma as she is confused and uncertain about her own identity. She wants to define herself. Sometimes she desires her companion, Bhadravati to become a woman, and at other times to be her original self. She imagines herself periodically to be a poodle, a bear, a sheep and ever a lover. Rather than prescribe to her patriarchy determined role, she mutates and transforms as per need and circumstance. Spindleshank’s quest is the replica of Suniti’s quest for identity.

She was large and reasonably good-looking, but she was hollow inside. There was a blackness inside her, an incessant craving. She decided that it would be her mission in life to assuage that darkness, to become substantial. (CC 80)

The shared goal of reinscribing the norms that have so far governed their existence bind the two in partnership. Namjoshi treats identity as flexible that can be changed or traversed at will. Rosi Braidotti defines it as ‘infinitely deconstructable figurations’, and compares it to ‘nomadic consciousness’, which is not permanent and only ‘makes those necessarily situated connections’ that are essential for survival. (Braidotti 33)

Bhadravati- the Cow of thousand faces, knows the art of transmutation. In the novella, we see her transforming into multiple beings in order to please Suniti. She is not only her partner but also acts as a guide and helps her in her mission. She mutates from lesbian cow into a woman and then into a man. Her attributes symbolize that identity is constitutive of as well as by the persona. This is why, she is the cow of a ‘thousand faces’ and a ‘thousand manifestations’. Change is essential for evolution. Namjoshi does not moralize or malign her characters. She provides them with individual and spatial freedom.

Hinduism inculcates the doctrine of reincarnation that says that identities are created on the basis of what one did in his/ her last life. In the introduction of her work Building Babel, Namjoshi writes:

... but if you think about it from a Hindu perspective, a person doesn’t go to heaven as the same person either- or get born as the same person. Who you are is just who you happen to be this time around. This notion vastly reduces the importance attached to identity. (BB xv)
Namjoshi’s remythologizing is possible because of the symbolic nature of paganism. She plays with ‘the notion of identity and the arbitrary attributes attached to it’. (BB xv) The familiar myths are presented on different terms. The renegotiations challenge androcentric rationality. Bhadravati is not a goddess who is a ‘mother’, but a goddess who loves other women. In lesbianism, motherhood is not welcomed as mothers are the agents of patriarchy and are at a higher risk of marginalization. Thus the agent of oppression metamorphoses into the agent of liberation. Suniti, on the other hand is a transgressor as she eats meat and discards the religious norms.

Historically gender is a societal construct and a product of nurturing that is dependent on the upbringing of an individual. Judith Butler says that it is based on ‘performance’. She suggests:

Gender is not performed in the sense of something that is donned every morning. Gender is not intentional in that willful sense. Gender is something that is put on a body by the materiality of its existence. One performs gender as society expects that repetitious, ritualized performance. (Mc Hugh 94- 95)

For Namjoshi, gender is a social product that is based on subjective construction, not on objective experience. She tries to deconstruct the idea of gender stereotyping. In a patriarchal society there are certain traits that are associated with masculinity e.g. brute strength, domination and rationality. If these traits are acquired by women, they are considered aberrations. In *Conversations of Cow*, Cowslip gives an account of two classes of humans i.e. A and B associated with men and women respectively:

Class A people don’t wear lipstick, Class B people do. Class A people spread themselves out. Class B people apologize for so much as occupying space. Class A people stand like blocks. Class B people look unbalanced. Class A people never smile. Class B people smile placatingly twice in a minute and seldom require any provocation. (CC 24)

Through this classification, Namjoshi presents the social biases of gender construction that she wishes to displace. She acts like a Separatist and weaves a gynocentric world where no man is allowed to enter. All the characters presented in the novella are women who are out- of- the closet lesbians. The writer depicts lesbian sub-culture and tries to bring into light their ways and manners of living, and also deals with their dilemmas. She describes how they long to love; to live like couples; earn and spend
together; to romance and woo their love; celebrate equal rights; and how they desire to be approved by society.

The novella presents the two contradictory worlds i.e. the homosexual and heterosexual. In patriarchy, heterosexuality prevails. Men and women marry, bear children and carry out the ‘logical pattern’ of life. But for lesbians the situation is quite complex. Their lives are not taken seriously and they are unsure about the patterns of their existence. When Suniti and Bhadravati fall in love, the former proposes but the latter refuses as two women can not be married:

“Ought we not to settle down and have children?”

Bhadravati answers, “It’s- it’s arbitrary, my dear. Well, who would we be?” (CC 90)

As Bhadravati knows the art of mutation, she offers Suniti manhood. When Suniti refuses, she changes herself into a man- Bud, so that they can follow the conservative mode of life. Namjoshi, critical of heterosexual institutions presents heterosexual relationship between Suniti and Bud as an example of male domination. She criticizes those women who even after being lesbians follow heteronormativity. ‘Bud’, the title of the fourth chapter is the inversion of the idea associated to the sensitivity of women, and is also indicative of Namjoshi’s attempt to deconstruct gender biases. Bud the Martian is patriarchal. He treats Suniti like an object. He dominates her and wants her to act like a ‘robot’. But Suniti rejects him, and he has to leave. By refusing to position herself thus, she transcends cultural boundaries. Namjoshi dismantles the idea of projecting women as innocent, subordinate and victimized. The position reversal from Baddy to Bud privileges Bhadravati with a first-hand experience of being a Martian. Suniti, subverted to the lower role, can acknowledge and subsequently challenge Bud’s oppressive and exclusionary strategies.

She discards both man/ woman and masculine/ feminine boundaries. “Suniti refuses to be torn between the binaries, and looks for a free and neutral zone where the tyranny of gender does not operate”. (Vijayasree 105) Her form of resistance is radical. She displaces the old order with a new one. She goes on to define the utility and significance of transformation. She revives the myth that men are aliens who belong to Mars and have come to rule the inhabitants of the earth i.e. women.
‘They rope you in.’
‘Rope you in?’
‘Yes, in accordance with their mission’.
‘And what’s that?’
‘The domestication of the species of planet earth.’ (CC 95)

Namjoshi has woven the plot of the novella with the use of fantasy and imagination. Bhadravati is the mistress of supernatural powers who could transform, appear and disappear. She is friend, guide and instructor to Suniti. Her conversations provide Suniti with wisdom and insight.

Namjoshi applies animal imagery. The symbolism of the ‘cow’ and its depiction as a superior being signifies the idea of human rights and power-balance. The lesbian cows to whom Bhadravati introduces Suniti are well-read and owners of land. They are independent as well as self-sufficient. Suniti’s defense of Bhadravati at the pizza place when the manager asks her to throw the cow out illustrates the writer’s concern for human rights. “The cow is the citizen of planet earth. If you throw us out, I shall complain about you to the Human Rights Commission”. (CC 23) Namjoshi is of the opinion that money and wealth play dominant roles in deciding different power positions. Bhadravati’s claim, “Money is power. Money transforms…”, and “Super Cow today has an independent income”, (CC 34) convey that the most privileged cow is ‘super’ as she earns independently. It also illustrates that for the emancipation of women it is necessary to be economically independent.

By constructing mythical characters, Namjoshi deconstructs the notion of conventional gendering and emphasizes the irrelevance of human particularities. She also points out that identities are not fixed. They are ‘fluid’ and can be transformed into the desired shape. The process of change is painful yet essential. A new path has to be forged outside patriarchal discourse. The new identity is not a limited one as it is ‘fluid’. It retains the scope for further reconfigurations and reinscriptions. The new woman who emerges is ‘wholly engaging’ and prepared ‘to write down all this.’ (CC 125)

Savita Goel calls it a ‘Utopian tale’ i.e. the representation of perfect imaginary places. In literature, ‘the utopia’ is considered the tale of superior level than the mere depiction of any world of fantasy. M. H. Abrams points out:

The Utopia can be distinguished from literary representations of imaginary places which, either because they are inordinately superior
to the present world or manifest exaggerated versions of some of its unsavory aspects, serve primarily as vehicles for satire on contemporary human life and society;.. (328)

The magical transformations of Bhadravati, the personified Canadian Cows, the love story of Suniti and a cow, the enchanting greenlands of Canada, appear mesmerizing yet bizarre.

**The Blue Donkey Fables**

*The Blue Donkey Fables* (BF- 1988), almost seventy in number, explore the lives of women through the reworking of well-known myths, fables and fairy tales. The text deals with the sharpening of her skills in genres, such as sonnets and heroic couplets, claims Namjoshi in *The Fabulous Feminist.* (88) The fables take into account philosophical and lofty notions about the emancipation of the subalterns and the marginalized. Problems of Third World women writers, animals’ rights, power hierarchy, identity, sexual orientation and gender stereotyping are dealt with. Some fables promote poets and poetry. The fables define patriarchal structures and express the author’s disapproval of the same structures being reproduced in feminist hierarchies.

Namjoshi’s concern is the actual process of marginalization and “othering” through which the dominant cultures perpetuate patriarchal ideologies. In *The Blue Donkey Fables,* she criticizes the institutions which have created fixed notions about identities and female bodies. She deconstructs the stereotypical ideas about gender, societal constructs and culture. She dismantles binaries of good and evil, heroism and cowardice, wisdom and foolishness, truth and lies, angels and saints etc.

The fascinating world, in which the Blue Donkey lives, has animals with human consciousness. Through the use of animal imagery, the author discusses subjects, like race and gender discrimination in an ironic manner. She uses wit and humour to lighten the subject. Vijayasree, in her work *The Artful Transgressor* points out:

Play has been traditionally associated with children and looked upon as a child’s imitation of the adult ways of living. By an extension of the same logic, considering women’s writing as play might equate it with women’s effort at imitating male ways of living, and implicate women
in patriarchy... But this playfulness is a sign of maturity and not of naivete. Patriarchy no longer can create insecurity in them since they have learnt to play about with the myths and mores of patriarchy.

(Vijayasree 118)

The title of the book *The Blue Donkey* is an emblem for the Third World women and the fables are named after her because she is the central character of many of the fables. ‘Donkey’, an ordinary animal, conventionally is associated with foolishness, is elevated and presented as intelligent and wise. The blue complexion of the donkey associates her to the people of colour and signifies the racial aspect of the text. In the very first fable, we see the supremacy of the dominant culture as the Blue Donkey is asked either to move to some other place or change her identity. She “must be of the purest and silkiest white” or “to be a non-descriptive grey”. (BF 1) The writer tries not only to redeem the dignity of people of colour, but also of the ordinary animals such as a donkey and presents her as the ideal for all. In her middle years the Blue Donkey acquires fame and attracts tourists. The townsfolk feel proud of her as she provides a source of income for them. ‘The Sinner’ (BF 36), again deals with the same aspect and is a wish fulfillment of the writer as a grey donkey (symbolizing the whites), tries to befriend the Blue Donkey and apologizes for her rude behaviour. “The donkey at her feet refused to budge. ‘I have been snotty and snobbish and often thought to myself that I despise blue donkeys and would never go near one or have one for a friend”.

People of colour have often become the victim of ridicule and are made fun of by the whites. After providing the Donkey a higher position, the writer tries to uplift the status of the coloured race. She depicts her as the wisest of all creatures, whether she is in the company of her followers or other animals. Different creatures come to seek her advice and also to listen to her stories of chivalry and heroism. The fables such as, ‘The Jacana’s Tale’ (BF 26- 27), ‘The Disciple’ (BF 28- 29), ‘The Three Piglets’ (BF 30- 31), ‘The Sinner’ (BF 36), ‘The Vulgar Streak’ (BF 37- 38), ‘Doubled and Redoubled’ (BF 81- 82), ‘Transit Gloria’ (BF 85- 86), all deal with the same theme. The tiger in the fable ‘The Disciple’, comes to her to gain wisdom, “I don’t want to learn tigrish things. It’s you I admire and I’ve come to you for Blue Donkey wisdom.” The three piglets in the fable ‘The Three Piglets’, come to seek Blue Donkey’s advice in opting their profession. She also teaches a lesson to the blue jay in ‘The Vulgar Streak’, when she boasts of her supremacy. In ‘Doubled and
Redoubled’, she proves to be wiser than Magpie when the latter spreads the news about her being capable of performing magic and turning straw into gold.

Namjoshi shows contempt for the entire human race as they harm each other. They are jealous and manipulate truths and weave lies as per need. In ‘Last Word’ (BF 5), Blue Donkey tries to suggest different reasons for her retirement, but the people indifferent to the truth, create their own reasons. “She found that in spite of all her efforts her friends heard what they wished to hear.” ‘Dazzler’ (BF 54), is a satire on the Rat Race, i.e. a situation where one does not want the other to occupy space out of competition and jealousy. The sunbird and the duck fight to occupy space in the sun.

The duck lost her temper. With a great flapping of wings she rushed at the sunbird. The sunbird dodged. The duck chased her. At last when the duck was certain that the sunbird had gone, she settled down again to sun herself. Three seconds later she heard the sunbird saying, ‘I told you it was fun. Now I’ll chase you and you dodge’. (BF 54)

Namjoshi likes to befriend wild animals such as lions rather than human beings for she wants to play safe and does not want to be harmed by the latter as they are more violent:

...And though the real people
Hadn’t yet harmed me,
I thought that they would
given the chance.

‘Control your emotions’
The grown-ups had said.

‘If any insult you,
Avert your head’.

But the message got muddled.
I cowered from the crowd, and fed
lions instead. (BF 7)

Ecofeminists argue that human beings treat non human creatures and nature as the Other. Namjoshi is not only unhappy with contemporary human ways, but also with their indifference and methods of treating nature. Val Plumwood, an ecofeminist argues, “...viewing humans and nature as separate and opposed and clinging to Cartesian rationality has lead to a distancing of humans from nature and a ruthless
treatment of nature as Other.” (Mc Hugh 91) Thus the writer defends animals and proves that they are better than human beings. ‘Explanation’ (BF 6-7), is a satire on the entire human race and explains that why she chose to write about plants and animals and not about people. She points out that the flora- fauna, and human beings are beyond comparison as the former are honest and uncomplaining:

Why do you write about plants and animals?

Why not people?

Because

no daffodil shrieks to be plucked,

no lily rages, ‘Admire my bower.’

...they make no work, to which she says,

‘that is not true’. (BF 6)

She shows her concern for ordinary animals such as, cats, monkeys, donkeys, piglets, rabbits, frogs etc. who have been marginalized not only in the real world but also in literature. She is critical of poets who talk about exotic creatures like nightingale and rose, and ignore others and consider them as non literary. ‘Poem Against Poets’ (BF 22), takes up the same aspect:

“I fall upon the thorns of life

I weep, I bleed,

but to what purpose?

There was once a poet

who thought she was a nightingale,

and another

who thought she was a rose-

charming perhaps...

... and Philomel wails

in the woods again.

But there are the other

More ordinary animals.

They are not literary

They own their pain. (BF 22)

Human beings consider themselves superior than animals and thus try to lash them and want them to act according to their desires. The mistress in ‘Prodigal Pudding’ (BF 18), wants to impose her will upon her cat. Rabbits in ‘Gracious Living’ (BF 73),
have been living on farmers’ mercy. She also defends cats in the fable ‘Cornered’ (BF 8), and justifies her deeds.

In Blue Donkey we not only see her concern about the issues of human rights but animals’ rights as well. ‘The Creation: Plan B’ (BF 21), depicts animal desire i.e. of Parrot and Tortoise to create a human free world as they feel that the latter are the sole cause of their suffering. ‘If Somehow I might...’ (BF 56), is the writer’s wish to see humans in their reversed form, i.e. in the form of apes (animals), as animals are free of worldly desires and evils:

I might have the vision  
To see humans in their simple reversion  
To animals, neither bitter, brutal, nor conscious  
of being anything other than themselves, ungracious  
in nothing, and unaware of the need  
... and I, having no reason to fear distress,  
Might find occasion to feel blessed and bless.

Here, Namjoshi uses the Darwinian theory of evolution, based on the concept that human beings have evolved from apes. She is of the opinion that human beings are corrupting the world, while animals are ignorant beings, “...and how being ignorant birds and unaware/ they live at ease in their native air”, (BF 64). Their world is placid, docile and simple, while our world is complex, wild and full of discomforts. She claims that human beings chase the race for power hierarchy and try to suppress others, thus, it is unworthy for them to live in animal kingdom. The fables ‘It’s not that the ...’ (BF 64), and ‘The beasts came up to me...’ (BF 80) deal with the same theme.

As far as human world is concerned, the writer is both a misogynist and misandriac. She hates both men and women (straight), in heterosexual institutions, and only approves of lesbians. She criticizes heteronormativity and mocks at man-woman relationship, where man is the master and woman is the slave. Judith Levine, in My Enemy, My Love: Man Hating and Ambivalence in Women’s Lives, points out:

Hatred to man is an emotional problem insofar as it creates pain and hostility between men and women. But it is not an individual neurosis... Hatred to man is a cultural problem... a cultural phenomenon... (Misandria)
Namjoshi is a lesbian feminist, and lesbians can fall in misandria as a result of the ‘dialectic reaffirmation of their identity’ (Misandria). In a man-woman relationship, a woman’s identity diminishes to a void as she is subordinated by man. The fable ‘Turf’ (BF 32), is indicative of man’s supremacy and power hierarchy. The mistress, her cat and the frog were happy beings till the mistress was not divorced by the master. As soon as her husband leaves her, both the mistress and the cat are driven out, while the frog rejoices as now she does not have the fear of being eaten by the cat. The queen in ‘Loner’ (BF 52), makes friends with a deer and escapes into the forest rather than to live with the king. She rejects patriarchy for she is not happy with the heteronormative ways of life and thus, identifies herself with beasts for culturally, they too are considered as ‘other’. The author claims in *The Jackass and the Lady*:

It’s apparent to many women that in a humanist universe, which has been male-centred historically, women are “the other”, together with the birds and the beasts and the rest of creation. And identification with the rest of creation, possibly with the whole of it, would only be logical. (29)

‘On that island’ (BF 61), is her hatred for all men and those women who serve them and subordinate them. She expresses her anger and resentment against the patriarchal society after reducing men to the position of pigs:

On that island where all men turned into pigs  
-there was no exception, the hero dreamt- …  
... I confess I was charmed, forgot my dislike  
of men behaving like pigs, and of women  
who catered to them. (BF 61)

Her ‘tiger’ fables also deal with the same issue as ‘tigers’ symbolize men. In the fable, ‘Among Tigers’ (BF 70), the author talks about different ways of marginalization of a woman in a patriarchal set-up:

From their point of view I exist, of course,  
but am hardly central, a fact of sorts’  
and of no consequence to their magnificence…  
...I fully understand the Tigrish Cause  
and keep my distance from those massive jaws.

Another fable ‘What the One-eyed Monkey Said to the Tigers’ (BF 71), also deals with the same theme.
In an androcentric society, wealth and power are considered to be the legacy of men. Gods too do not cater to the needs of women and provide privileges only to men. Namjoshi criticizes gods and says that patriarchy not only prevails in society but among gods as well. In the fable ‘The Fortunate One’ (BF 75- 76), gods are not concerned about providing power and wealth to the queen. They just bless her with all the attributes that subordinate her to men, such as the role of a mother, a woman and a queen and test her for her duties and drudgeries.

Namjoshi claims that it is only in a woman- woman relationship that a woman is safe from being marginalized. Many of her fables deal with lesbian eroticism and lesbians romanticizing love. According to her, a woman can associate with another woman and thus, share her identity, as said in the fable, ‘The Lion Skin’ (BF 33), “you be me, and I’ll be you”. She talks about the interchangeable nature of identities that removes all the differences between the two women, and also recapitulates her concept of ‘identity fluidity’ and its flexibility. Her other fable, ‘Triptych’ (BF 96), also deals with the same theme.

Apart from the fluidity of identity, Blue Donkey Fables also deals with the aspect of identity crisis and quest for identity. The writer takes up the images of monstrous, heroic and godly figures of classical myths, such as Athene, Arachne, Medusa, Perseus etc. to break up the myths about gender identity and gender stereotypes which represent the frightening consequences of conformity to patriarchal norms. Athene in ‘Olive Branch’ (BF 46- 47), suffers from identity crisis as her manners were masculine. She is motherless and has no female friend, and is called her ‘father’s daughter’. She has been on men’s side as the world has been dominated by them. But due to the need of the hour, she desires to change her identity. She tells her owl:

It’s all a matter of identity and gender. To you it doesn’t matter. You’re only an owl. But the modern women are turning against me. They say I’m really on the side of the man’... ‘Oh you silly bird! Don’t you understand that the times have changed and that in accordance with the times I have to change my image?’ (BF 46-47)

Identities of objects vary from person to person. The construction and the deconstruction of identity is a subjective experience, as the value of the golden coin is different both for the Magpie and the woman in ‘Magpie’ (BF 55). She is unaware about its value and is just charmed by its ‘glints and glitters’, while the woman knows
its commercial value and thus wants to possess it. The fable ‘Bride’ (BF 57), says that 
women should possess feminine qualities. The young prince rejects the best girls, 
...“these women have excelled,’ he said to his father, ‘but they seem to be lacking in 
womanly qualities.’ ‘Well of course,’ said his father. ‘I have weeded these out. You 
can now choose from those who did not compete.’ ‘Apotheosis’ (BF 3), discusses the 
deconstruction of identity. The Blue Donkey is put in a stable after acquiring fame, 
and becomes the object of tourist attraction. But their plea for a snippet of her fur 
makes her lose her identity:

And when the tourists pleaded for a snippet of her rare fur, she allowed
them to snip and chop as they wished. Soon she began to look scruffy.
The townsfolk worried. They shut down the stable and begged her to
grow her fur quickly. The Blue Donkey obliged, and then they
discovered that her fur had turned a beautiful grey. (BF 3)

The pressure on Blue Donkey caused her hair to turn grey and she lost her position as 
the prime tourist attraction.

‘Doubled and Redoubled’(BF 81- 82), deals with the identity construction. 
The Blue Donkey is able to create a situation by which other animals are able to 
believe her and the Magpie to be saints, when they are not. She tells the Magpie, 
“‘Oh, I don’t know. Two miracles in the course of a day, two saints where at first 
there were none’...

The Blue Donkey Fables apparently have the characters indulging in 
absurdities. But these absurdities disguise meaningful notions. Namjoshi’s self-
referential fable ‘Serious Danger (BF 83- 84), deals with Suniti’s dream of identity 
transformation. She first masks herself with a tiger’s skin and then switches over to a 
donkey’s skin after being dissatisfied with tigrish customs. Fed up with being a 
woman in the so called ‘normal world’ she experiments with animal identities.

Identities are constructed out of multiplicitous effects and perceptions of 
tradition, modernity and globalization. Identities become complex when they are 
related to sexuality. Lesbians suffer from the crisis of gender identity. They are 
women biologically, but their manners and their sexual choices are masculine. They 
suffer from the dilemma about their own existence. ‘Ordinary Women’ (BF 92- 93), 
deals with lesbians yearning for identity. The woman is confused as she could not 
behave like ordinary women and aspires to be a knight, but is not able to fulfill her
desire due to her lack of height. Moreover, she is charmed by women and men do not interest her:

I was courteous, I was tough, but not tall enough. I sat among the women and watched the knights. I lounged among the knights and watched the women. At last somebody said, ‘This really won’t do’.

So we all got up.

We mixed and we mingled, we shared a common cause.

Half way through it all I fell in love.

‘There is no wooer and no one is wooed’,… (BF 92)

The last line indicates the mashing up of identities, and there is dilemma about who should be wooed and by whom. And their confusion is ended when they say, “And at last I understood.” Right,’ I said. ‘You are a lady, and I/ am a lesbian.’ (BF 93)

In many of her fables, Namjoshi tries to deconstruct the stereotypical notions about identities and ideologies. Her ‘Angel Poems’ (BF 13 - 14), ‘The Saint and the Robin’ (BF 16 - 17), ‘The Hermit in her wisdom…’ (BF 74), deconstruct the notion about the supremacy of angels and saints:

‘Acquit yourself of a superior wisdom, love whom you can, O you silly saint.

There’s nothing to it’ (BF 16)

The writer actually mocks at conventional archetypes such as saints and angels. Saints are obsessed with the idea of their supremacy and try to impart morals to Robin who is an ordinary bird. But Robin proves to be wiser than the saint. ‘Ivory Apes’ (BF 78 - 79), points out that evil and good are subjective experience. The three monkeys are unable to differentiate between good and evil and live in an illusory world. We see the inversion of the concept of good and evil as they consider good as what evil is in the ‘normal’ world and vice-versa. ‘Transit Gloria’ (BF 85 - 86), and ‘Thunder and Lightening’ (BF 102) dismantle the idea of heroism. Shanti- the grandmother of Blue Donkey does not possess the stereotypical qualities of a hero, but due to her intelligence Blue Donkey considers her heroic.
The fables act as a tribute to poets and writers that comments on poetic exercise, poetic practice, poetic content, readers, publishers and publications. Fables, such as, 'Poetic Practice' (BF 11-12), 'Lesson Number Three' (BF 39-40), deal with practicing the art of poetry. Other fables, like 'Interpose an island' (BF 23), takes up the idea of poetic imagination, the kind of art that a poet possesses which has the potential to construct or deconstruct things and ideas. "Interpose an island in salty seas?/ As though we were gods and could create/ real places?" (BF 23) A poet also has the capability to convert a woman, into a goddess. 'Cythera' (BF 45), says:

...but I thought
to myself I would make poem
out of this, of how I sat on a beach
and gossiped with a goddess...

In 'The Return of the Giantess' (BF 48), none of the creations of the universe had the ability to hold the giantess, except for the poetic imagination:

...to receive her, neither grass, nor sky,
nor the pounding sea could hold her in,
and I held her close and we had our fill.

Being a poet requires a lot of hard work. One has to burn the midnight oil in order to write poetry. It is a painful experience when one does not get the opportunity to get one's work recognized. Writing from the margins is a major problem in feminism, and Blue Donkey Fables deals with the hardships and difficulties that the Third World women writers face during their career. Namjoshi deals with women writers' fear of not gaining due recognition and being marginalized. The author takes up the issue of Third World women writers in particular. Third World women writers not only suffer from the inability to create as they do not have their 'foremothers' to serve as models, but also from the insecurity of not being able to publish and acquire readers.

One-eyed Monkey in 'The One-eyed Monkey Goes into Print' (BF 9-10), needs crocodiles' help to get her work published as it has been rejected by publishers for lacking in human interest. With great difficulty a publisher agrees, but has a problem with her title. The original title, 'Leanings of a One-eyed Monkey' is first replaced by 'Life and Leanings of a One-eyed Blank', so as to hide the identity of the Monkey. But the title is again objected to as it is ambiguous. The book finally achieves only a moderate success under the title, 'The Amorous Adventures of a One-
eyed Minx’. Blue Donkey in ‘Dusty Distance’ (BF 24- 25), too faces difficulty of writing from the margins, and lack of readership. Thus, the Donkey has to leave her poetic practice and settle for a part-time job for half a carrot.

Readership is quite important for a writer as it is readers’ response that makes a writer’s work successful. Today the role of the reader is more important than that of the writer. In the fable, ‘Dear Reader’ (BF 51), Namjoshi makes use of the Readers’ Response Theory and says that the meaning of the text is now decided by the readers. The poet addresses readers:

If your sun had been the colour of milky chalk
or had presented a more muted show?
What can I say? Perhaps I’d have shouted, ‘Yellow!
Bright yellow! And you’d have refused to say it was so. (BF 51)

She criticizes poets for being dishonest as they have the license to create myths and lies. ‘The Three Piglets’ (BF 30), deals with poetic manipulation, while ‘If You Know What I Mean’ (BF 49- 50), is a satire on writers who write in praise of the rulers so as to achieve their favour. They lie and exaggerate in order to flatter them. The jackal praises the lioness, “O Lady, she ventured, ‘when the sun goes down your burnished fur gives light to lesser creatures who inhabit the night?’ ‘Craft’ (BF 69), blames poets for being dishonest, “She was merely engaged in doing profitably what she has always done: making up myths, creating as it were, a suitable self, fabricating, as you’ve heard, the necessary lies.” ‘In the Garden’ (BF 87- 88), criticizes contemporary poetry. ‘Stilted Poem’ (BF 89), again is a satire on romantic poetry in which the poet lies with the use of figurative speech, such as metaphors and similies:

...- that your eyes

Were like mirrors-
That they changed- swirled-
were a dream

Of drowning-...

She criticizes poets and writers for being dishonest, fabricating and creating myths. This also seems to be the criticism of her own self as she too is a fabulist who is perfect in fantasizing and myth making. She mocks poets for working so hard and being proud as they too have faced death like a layman. She adheres to Shakespeare’s idea of death in his sonnets. ‘To Be a Poet’ (BF 98), talks about the inevitability of death. The writer points out the fact that however the poets may be distinct but their
doom is same as that of a common man. Death reduces all the differences. Death is supreme.

_The Blue Donkey Fables_ capture the spirit of her earlier works but also serve to further her feminist quest. Her radical views are imparted through recast of familiar identities. The work satirizes the patriarchal tendency to grade everything unfamiliar as negative. The author in her rewritings, inverts the conventional concepts of decency, respectability, patriotism, trust, true love etc. The politics of power structures and invented identities is dealt with in a thought-provoking manner. The compact format of the fable provides her with the perfect medium for communicating the implicit sensitivities without sermonizing.

Suniti Namjoshi’s fiction attempts to establish an alternative universe through the use of the fantasy mode. Namjoshi resorts to fantasy not to escape from reality but to reconstruct it. She reworks ancient and canonical myths and fables in order to define the new, feminist lesbian identity. In the process, she discovers untold stories and also creates new ones. The author, herself, is frequently the protagonist in her works. In this role her concern is to explore the motives behind and the consequences of categorizing and labeling individual, races and communities as negative. She disrupts mainstream notions of gender, race, nationality and sexual preference.
Works- Cited


Chapter Three

"The Problem is Words!"
A Study of *The Mothers of Maya Diip*,
*St. Suniti and the Dragon*,
*Building Babel* and *Goja*
The Mothers of Maya Diip

The Mothers of Maya Diip (MD-1989), is located on a mythical island created by Namjoshi. As a radical feminist she builds a dystopian world where no man is welcomed. The book is divided into three parts reflecting three different worlds and different societal orders. As it is a dystopian novel, the places depicted are horrific and repulsive, and contradict the present world. They are the manifestation of satire on contemporary human life. M.H. Abrams define dystopia as:

The term dystopia ("bad place") has recently come to be applied to works of fiction, including science fiction, that represent a very unpleasant imaginary world in which tendencies of our present social, political, and technological order are projected into a disastrous future culmination. (Abrams 328)

The novel takes into account sexual politics, reproductive rights, history of patriarchy, homosexual and heterosexual institutions, power hierarchy and power imbalance. It opens with the conversation of Blue Donkey and Jyanvi- an Indian feminist poet about Maya Diip. The Blue Donkey gets an invitation from Ranisaheb-the matriarch, to visit the island. Curiosity of the place for being a matriarchal state draws them to Maya Diip. Later they visit Ashagad- the city of Hope, encounter Androids- machine men, and are marooned in Paradise. All the above mentioned places symbolize different social institutions. Their journey is educational and finally they come to terms with their own choices. Vijayasree calls the novel a ‘feminist dystopia’. She says:

The Mothers of Maya Diip has all the features of a feminist dys(u)topia: defamiliarization achieved through strange characters and incidents, creation of an imaginary world very different from the real, journey, quest, and so on. (Vijayasree 114)

The opening of the novel makes it clear that the existence of Matriarchy is surprisingly unbelievable. We see the feminists debating humorously on the issue:

Was this a joke or had she been recognized? There were rumours about that a matriarchy did exist, but no one was quite sure whether it was historical fact, a legend or a dream. The thought that it might be a functioning reality made feminists tremble. They spoke in hushed
voices and exchanged scraps of paper which they told one another
were mutilated messages from the Maternal Deep. (MD 5)

Historically, women have ruled the world, but all those evidences are found no
more and thus, the matriarchal rule seems to be a dilemma or illusion. Maya Diip is a
place where young boys are not given privileges. It depicts a lesbian culture where the
status of boys is just to provide semen to women. The impregnation is done through
artificial insemination. After the purpose is served, they are thrown into the sea where
they die fighting with the waves and in a bizarre explanation are said to turn into
foam. Valerie- an immigrant from heterosexual European society, informs Jyanvi:

Boys aren't the norm on Maya Diip. The boys fight among themselves.
The mothers of Maya let them. Eventually there's nothing left to fight,
only the waves. So, they fight the waves, turn into foam...Mayans
think that except for the semen the lives of pretty boys are perfectly
pointless. (MD 53)

*Maya Diip* is an allegory that symbolizes contemporary patterns of
heterogeneous societies. The writer attacks the world with the use of satire and irony,
and uses fantasy to explore areas of life that realist literature represses, and present
notions contradictory to androcentric ideologies. She not only fantasizes but employs
'feminist fabulation' in order to abolish the stereotypes and create a new world for
women. To quote Barr:

'Feminist fabulation'...offers us a world clearly and radically
discontinuous from the patriarchal one we know, yet returns to
confront that known patriarchal world in some feminist cognitive way.
(Barr10)

All the three parts of the book are prologued with the lines and imagery from
Alice books, i.e. *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass*
which itself create a mesmerizing effect on the reader providing the novel a form of a
wonderland. We see a 'Looking Glass' world where everything is present in queer
fashion. The Mayans, the Ashans, Androids, and the people of Paradise have weird
ways and patterns of life. Maya Diip and Ashagad are the mirror images of each other
as both of them are controlled by mothers and follow the same pattern of governance.
Maya Diip is the habitat of women while Ashagad is the home of pretty boys who are
abandoned beneath a 'tree' that symbolizes life for Ashans and death for Mayans. The
boys are rescued by the exiled Asha and given a new lease of life. As the Mayans are
strict about the laws, rules and regulations, the matriarch exiles her own daughter and considers her as an ‘Apostasy’ for demanding equal rights for pretty boys. Asha leaves for the forest and establishes her own kingdom, known as Ashagad.

The writer assesses a female-oriented society from a feminist point of view, and finds that inequality and discrimination prevail even in a gynocentric world. Maya Diip inspite of being a matriarchy is a replica of an androcentric society. The mothers of the island are categorized as poets, civil servants, priestesses, and spend their lives with female partners and daughters. The writer mocks at the unequal power distribution and compares it with a heterosexual institution. Each woman is designated as either a Grade A, B or C mother. Grade A mothers are the chiefs of Guilds such as Guilds of poets, Goddess’ servants, civil servants etc., and possess the highest status. They usually bear their own daughters; Grade B mothers are just the biological mothers, while Grade C mothers take care and work for their daughters and are the least privileged mothers. The matriarch is concerned about providing the best to the daughters and wants her own kin to be the next ruler. Apparently, the norms of Maya Diip are generous and soft for all, but in reality power positions are central concerns. They are worried about their own interest or the interest of their daughters. Valerie, an immigrant from the European heterosexual society and one of the mothers of the island tells Jyanvi and the Blue Donkey:

“In theory all the Daughters of Maya look to the Matriarch as an incarnation of the supreme mother; but in practice the bloodline has been unbroken for seven hundred years.” (MD 19)

It is ironic that rivalry and jealousy which are one of the forbidden attributes of the island also prevail there. In order to capture the throne, Shyamila and Pramila-the daughters of the Matriarch scheme and intrigue to overthrow their mother. Namjoshi presents Jyanvi as a social reformer who tries to make Mayans aware about social discrimination. In her conversations with Saraswati whom she is courting, she says:

Can’t you see that the more powerful mothers hire other women to care for their children? The more powerful the mother, the more privileged the child. (MD 39) She further adds, What good is rank if you don’t have the money to back it up?...In a just society everyone ought to be equal. (MD 32-33)
She acts like the hero of traditional fairy tales who travel in order to save and reform the world from evil. In Mothers, there is no concrete danger as we see in old tales, such as dragons and monsters rather, the evil and fear are penetrated within societies and lick them like termites. Jyanvi does not have swords and weapons to fight danger but instead she is privileged with the boon of being a poet. As a poet she produces such ideas that are harsh to bring about change. From Maya Diip to Paradise and back to Maya Diip again, we see many examples of her caliber. She makes the Mayans aware about class and sex discrimination and rejects the idea of compulsory motherhood. She also produces an epic poem to boost the morale of the Gallants of Paradise when they help the Matriarch to regain her territory. The novel also contains the element of love and romance which along with the above mentioned episodes provide the book an epic form:

There’s something of the epic about this story, with its arcane religious ceremonies, its power struggles between priestesses and queens. We are offered not one, but two fictional, fantastic city states. At one point the Ranisaheb and her entourage are cast out of the city and exiled in a forest. There’s even a love story, most of the time about two people who are completely incapable to understand one another. ("Review: The Fabulous Feminist")

Androids- the machine men are also associated with heterosexual patriarchal milieu. Their arrival at Ashagad to rescue Valerie- an inhabitant of their own land and seduction of the young boys to go along with them reflect their narrow vision. They have been programmed as traders and desire to sell the matriarch and her daughters along with Jyanvi and Blue Donkey to the people of Paradise. A mother is not more than a machine for them as they call their helicopter their mother, “You see, the ‘copter’s our mother, and we are her babies”. (MD 105) The mechanized mother periodically feeds them with fluids. When the supply runs out they crash into the sea. Android’s sole purpose to trade is symbolic of the political scenario of imperial power in India and their intention to colonize. They are the agents of patriarchy and want to subvert and impose their dominant culture over the non- heteronormative society, such as Ashagad. They are conscious of their masculinity, and like the real men of androcentric world, consider women as feeble and frail creatures. The comics and books they read have images of men as strong and women as tiny beings:
Some were reading comic books and some were standing guard beside the helicopter. Out of curiosity Madhu peered at the cover of one of the comic books. It portrayed a large metal male rampaging about, while two or three diminutive females, who appeared to be made of flesh and blood, clung to him. (MD 101-02)

Valerie who acts as an informer in the whole novel, tells Ashans about the injustice prevailing in male dominated heterosexual world. She compares “Ashans” with men and “Mayans” with women and says:

“You see the “Ashans” and the “Mayans” in my country all lived together. And the “Ashans” bullied the “Mayans”. She further tells about the history of patriarchy and their treatment of women, I mean that the Ashans had all the power. No, don’t interrupt… Every Ashan thought of himself as a kind of farmer, and of every Mayan as a bit of land or a field which could be his property’. (MD 83-84)

The next place is Paradise which is inhabited by women immigrants belonging to two different genders- Gallants and Mothers. The place suffers from a crisis of the lack of Mothers. The imbalance of the two genders led the Gallants to commit suicide. They yearn for mothers and suffer for their love. It is ironical that the place once discovered by Princess Jaya, a mother of Maya Diip falls short in population of mothers. Namjoshi creates myth within the myth as the story suggests that the Princess leaves the Mayan empire for the sake of Beauty- a statue, and lands in Paradise where she worships it in order to bring her to life, and then both of them die. The idea of adoring the statue is reflective of the patriarchal notion for women to chase ‘beauty’, which in Feminism is meant for male gaze. According to feminist point of view, the princess has followed the wrong idea, she is destined to suffer, and thus she dies. She does not want to be a mother and only worships her love, therefore the place lacks in mothers. Her death is a curse that affects the whole Paradise, and this is the reason that the Gallants of the island commit suicide when it comes the turn to become mothers, for it is the norm to chose a gender only for ten years and then the gender roles are reversed. However, they yearn for mothers but are not ready to take the responsibility of mothering. Here we see women experiencing multiple sexual identities. Namjoshi attempts to discard Freudian theory of ‘penis envy’, according to which women lack male- sexual organ and are inferior to them, and thus become the victim of penis envy. She redeems the dignity of women and presents them as
satisfied happy beings who celebrate their own sex and femininity. Luce Irigaray in *This Sex Which Is Not One* (1985), argues that the feminine sexuality of women can be created by them modeled on their own sexual organs, the labia that are two already and may be more, and their own orgasms as multiple. She says, ‘[h]er sexuality is at least double, goes even further, it is plural’. (Irigaray 32) She wants to convey that feminine theory, language and social order may be multiple and pluralistic like that of phallocentric order that translates from sexuality to language and theory.

Children are associated with innocence and lack of knowledge while adults with intelligence, experience and wit. In Maya Diip a girl child attains an adult status only after getting the training of a mother and rearing children, similarly in Paradise the absence of children and lack of mothers make the Gallants behave childish. They are insensible and want to be pampered by mothers as it is the mother who helps to develop the personality of a child. Gallants are directionless and hence are called as the ‘unruly children’ by the Matriarch of Maya Diip. The Gallants behave childishly but the Queen of Paradise lives in illusion as she says that the presence of children would spoil everything. She is ready to welcome feminine gender irrespective of their sex. She allows Asha- the Apostle to bring her Ashan boys to the island, provided that they could not bear their own children.

...I mean would my Ashans be welcome here?’ The Queen of Paradise seemed surprised. ‘Of course they’d be welcome, particularly if they were willing to start out as Mothers. Since Paradise was founded by a Mayan Princess we use the feminine gender for everyone. In Paradise that’s not a matter of any consequence. In Paradise it’s whether you’re a Gallant or a Mother that makes the real difference. Would your Ashans like to come here as Mothers by any chance?’

‘The problem is, Asha said awkwardly, ‘my Ashans want real children.’

The Queen of Paradise shook her head. ‘No, that won’t do at all.’ (MD 124-25)

The Queen of Paradise is the imitation of Jyanvi who also does not want to rear or bear children. The novelist like the *Conversations of Cow*, continues to question the quest for identity. Here again we see a women oriented world which towards the end is disillusioned and comes with terms with its identity related to alternative sexualities. Everything settles down, the ‘unruly children’ of Paradise i.e.
Gallants, get Shyamila as their Supreme Mother; the Matriarch of Maya Diip retires to the forest along with Blue Donkey; Asha returns back to her empire; and Jyanvi who does not like to rear children, becomes the guardian of Asha’s daughter- Gagri, and the ruler of Maya Diip. The writer explores numerous sexual identities and brings forth the idea that the kind of identity one choses is purely a personal choice and that an individual’s sovereignty should not be tested or restricted.

In terms of the Utopia, women have achieved success in all spheres of life. They live happily and prosper. To have a daughter is a matter of prestige. Boys are needed to propagate the human race. It is the misuse of woman in her husband’s androcentric family that causes the parting of mother- daughter relationship. A lesbian daughter retrieves this bond without taking care of male domination of her body. Aderienne Rich discusses it as:

This Cathexis between mother and daughter- essential, distorted, misused- is the great unwritten story. Probably there is nothing in human nature more resonant with charges than the flow of energy between two biologically alike bodies, one of which has lain in amniotic bliss inside the other, one of which has labored to give birth to the other. The materials are here for the deepest mutuality and the most painful estrangement. Yet this relationship has been minimized and trivialized in the annals of patriarchy... Like intense relationships of women in general, the relationship between mother and daughter has been profoundly threatening to men. (Rich 226- 27)

The mothers of Maya Diip are highly concerned about their daughters. A single child lives under the supervision of three mothers. They are happy families who live in cocoon isolated from male dominated world, and celebrate their freedom in all spheres of life. The writer actually assesses her own political beliefs against her dedication to familial bond. Being brought up and loved by three women, her mother, grandmother and a female servant- Goja, the idea of motherhood seems of great importance to her. This trinity of mothers could be associated with the three categories of mothers of the novel.

Chandra Talpade Mohanty brings out the fact that since 1980s, discrepancy between women has come to govern the plan of women’s movement, and common resemblances between them are not settled. The Third World women disapprove of feminists for inflicting Western ethics such as “autonomy” and “individual freedom”
on other cultures as they accentuate their values in order to bring modernity (Mohanty 51-58). Namjoshi continues this philosophy and says that feminism should be particular about the divergence between factions of women instead of imposing ‘Western normative’ framework upon them.

The Mothers of Maya Diip depicts Indian culture. It presents the glimpses of South India, particularly western Maharashtra where the writer has grown up as a child. The women whom we see in the novel clad themselves in Saris, wear make-up, and apply perfumes and coconut oil. They are Third World women who give importance to motherhood and want to retain their feminine culture. They value maternal labour even after they gain access to education and income. In Indian culture motherhood carries great weight, both economically and spiritually. Land represents Mother Earth or ‘Maatra Bhumi’. Even India is called as ‘Mother India’. As India is a land of myths and legends, rationality and logic are secondary to Indians for they feed upon beliefs and superstitions. In Building Babel, Namjoshi says:

India didn’t have Cartesian rationalism, Hume’s skepticism or Locke’s empiricism. The Upanishads, which are philosophical texts, are no less and no more important than say the Gita, which is embedded in an epic. (Namjoshi introduc. XI)

Mothers have always been worshipped worldwide. In Hindu mythology goddesses are considered mothers. The goddess Kali or Black mother could be associated with the mothers of the Mayan empire as they too are the women of colour and like the mentioned goddess have the capability to create or destroy. They both give birth and leave the pretty boys to die.

The primitive tie among women in the form of relationships such as mothers, daughters and sisters leads to the emergence of lesbianism. In Mothers, the writer criticizes lesbian mothers for giving preference to daughters and leaving their sons to die. She brings forth the idea of Human Rights according to which all human beings should equally be treated. In Maya Diip, the pretty boys are not only thrown into the sea but are also used as experimental instruments by young daughters in their training to attain adulthood. During the test of Gagri- the Good, the examiner first provided her a wooden doll, then a real baby boy:

…the examiner opened another case- it was padded and equipped with air holes- and produced a baby. It’s one of the pretty boys… The baby was filthy. Its nose ran. It had soiled its clothes. The examiner held it
out to her... Gagri clutched the baby. The baby howled. Gagri clutched baby harder; the baby’s howling increased in volume. (MD 43)

The entire episode is indicative of inhuman act towards baby boys who are treated as mere non- living objects. The writer wants to eliminate injustice prevailing in the world as Feminism is not only concerned about the cause of women but takes initiatives to change and transform society. Teresa Billington Greg discusses Feminism as:

The reorganization of the world upon a basis of sex- equality in all human relations, a movement which would reject every differentiation between individuals upon the ground of sex, would abolish all sex privileges and sex burdens, and would strive to set up the recognition of the common humanity of woman and man as the foundation of law and custom. (Singh 24)

According to Namjoshi, Motherhood is an endless debate within and outside feminist community. The concept of motherhood as conceived by male imagination restricts a woman’s quest for completeness. The pressures weaken women’s spirits. In patriarchy all women are expected to be mothers. Barrenness is considered a vice. Mothers are expected to be selfless, sacrificing and virtuous. This idealization is, ultimately, unrealistic and harassing. Lesbian mothers are beyond patriarchal control as they procreate without sex with the help of artificial insemination and celebrate their motherhood. They are mothers not by force but by choice.

The novel discusses the changing dynamics of lesbian politics. There are different categories of lesbians. Some simply want women partners. There are others who in spite of opting for a woman partner want to rear and bear children and enjoy motherhood. The second category of lesbians exists in Maya Diip. They live together, procreate and rear children, and employ women to take care of them. Namjoshi experiments with alternative community living in the whole novel. Jyanvi is a rebel as in Mayadeep she belongs to the first category. She loves Saraswati, but refuses co-mothership of her daughter. Her Song of a Non- Mother is considered as an offence for Mayans:

I loved my love with passion.
She said, ‘Will you marry me?’
I said, ‘Is that the fashion?’
She said, ‘It is indeed.’
I cooked and cleaned and scouréd.
I worked myself to the bone.
Her little children devoured
My labours every one.
They were clean and quick and sprightly.
They scampered in the sun.
‘I must go,’ I said politely,
and left true love alone. (MD 24)

She further tells the Blue Donkey about Saraswati:

‘She asked me what I meant—was I asking to take on the co-
mothership of her daughter, Sona? I couldn’t see what that had to do
with anything, but I asked when it involved. And she said it meant
joint responsibility for the raising of the child.’ (MD 21)

Jyanvi believes in individuality. She is an unwomanly woman who clads
herself in jeans and trousers. She dislikes children as she believes they reduce
opportunities for mothers. She is in favour of non-reproductive sex. She says,
“...They take everything and give nothing. They’re greedy monsters.” (MD 37)
Jyanvi is a poet and due to her business as Grade C mother, does not have the time to
write, “As Gagri’s personal servant I feed her my life. When is there time?” (MD 36)
Namjoshi deals with the aspect of gender identity and deconstructs the stereotypical
patriarchal notion about compulsory motherhood. She insists to create a new
discourse of maternity that can generate societal association to provide women a new
identity where they do not feel the necessity to decide between a career and
motherhood.

Dana Densmore in Independence from the Sexual Revolution (1971) brings
forth the idea that women’s liberation is not equivalent to sexual liberation. She
further adds that ‘spiritual freedom, intellectual freedom, freedom from invasions of
privacy and the insults of degrading stereotypes’ are major ploys to keep women
subjugated. Jyanvi’s refusal to rear Saraswati’s daughter and blaming her to be an
obstacle in her intellectual progress is indicative of her radical approach to feminism
emphasizing sexual as well as freedom of the mind, whereas, Shulamith Firestone
accentuates sexual liberation in The Dialectic of Sex (1970), and says that to end their
subordination women must seize the means of reproduction and employ technologies
to free themselves of gender subordination, heterosexuality and traditional roles of women as faithful housewives and child-bearing machines:

Their seizure of the means of production, so as to assure the elimination of sexual classes requires the revolt of the underclass (women) and the seizure of control of reproduction: not only the full restoration to women of ownership of their own bodies, but also their (temporary) seizure of control of human fertility- the new biology as well as all the social institutions of child-bearing and child-rearing.

(Firestone 11)

The mothers of Maya Diip propagate the same idea as they believe that it is only through advanced technologies of artificial reproduction women could be emancipated from the basic discrimination of producing and nurturing children. They are aware of patriarchal treatment of women; therefore, they create their own matriarchal world separate from the male dominated society. Valerie once tells the Blue Donkey, “…in patriarchies, the children govern; and to be a woman is bad, to be a mother is usually worse.” (MD 14)

According to Namjoshi, heteronormativity is a weapon to enslave women. She criticizes man-woman relationship through the character of Valerie. Valerie is the agent who brings about the idea of heterosexual society. She is presented as a bisexual who once lived in patriarchy, but later migrated to Maya Diip and preferred to live as a lesbian. She says, “Here by the grace of the Mayan Queen/ I can be at last who I have always been.” (MD 13) She is the one who makes Ashans familiar with the evil notions of ‘slavery, rape and war’. She imparts knowledge to young Ashans and is accused of being the ‘serpent in her Garden of Eden’.

Namjoshi calls for a new idea of maternity that approves the significance of maternal role in the growth of subjectivity and culture. Julia Kristeva in her essay ‘Motherhood According to Bellini’, sees femininity not as a rigid sexuality précised to women, but as a biased psychic position via an orderly phase of experience protected in the unconscious. For her ‘woman’ is a metaphysical term, and femininity and masculinity coexist in each individual and are not binary antagonisms. She gives voice to women as mothers and calls them as social and speaking beings. She further says that maternal function cannot be reduced to women and the maternal role could be played by anyone, men or women to a certain degree. (“Julia Kristeva’s Works”) Namjoshi removes conventional gender biases as she not only presents maternal spirit
but discusses paternal feelings as well. In the second part of the book pretty boys are capable of taking care of children. Asha tells Saraswati, “The pretty boys can’t become biological mothers, but they are certainly capable of Grade A and Grade C status. We’ve proved it here in Ashagad.” (MD 80) And Madhu- one of the Ashans talks about producing babies from his own flesh. He tells Asha:

‘And anyway there was another idea which several of us found more interesting, and that was being able to stamp your own babies genetically.’ He glanced at Balu’s cot and continued painfully, ‘I love Balu, but if I knew he carried half my genes, then I think I might feel differently. Perhaps love him more?’ (MD 93)

Like the daughters of Maya Diip, Young boys of Ashagad are also trained to take care of children in order to achieve adulthood. Asha tries to build a gender neutral society. She is an androgynist who does not want to reject men completely. She is against patriarchy and not against men. She demands a transformation in Maya Diip, thus, is sent in exile. She wants, “a change in the institutions of Maya and equal rights for boys...Boys should also be given a decent education and be allowed to grow up into mothers like everyone else.” (MD 80) In her work The Fabulous Feminist, Namjoshi discusses that “how a civilized male society might work”. (121) She claims that a healthy society has to be based on equality, and a drastic change may occur if women and men are given the same privileges.

The novel also takes into account Cultural Feminism which is based on a matriarchal vision and brings forth the concept of a female concerned society of strong women, which include, “…pacifism, co-operation, non-violent settlement of differences, and a harmonious regulation of public life. The result of integrating the feminine into the public world may be a desired feminization of culture”. (Tandon 52) Maya Diip is governed and dwelled by strong women who have their own feminine culture. They have their own police to deal with “maladjusted mothers, unsisterly sisters, rivalries and jealousies of diverse sorts...” (MD 20) Cultural feminism believes in the idea that there are differences between the ways and experiences of men and women, and that women’s ways are the better one.

In the whole novel, the writer applies different radical feminist’s theories and puts the idea that discarding male domination would liberate the world from oppression. Procreation has been made suppressive by men. She wants to free women from biological maternity so as to free maternity from male domination. But at the
same time all her efforts are wasted as differences and discriminations may exist even in a matriarchal society. The inner world of Namjoshi’s narrative accommodates multiple lesbian perspectives. Female desire is discussed openly and unabashedly. Her characters such as Valerie and Jyanvi find their salvation in their sexual choices as they escape from their male infidelity. The folklore format of the novel softens the edge of reality yet engages it in reflections on gender politics, while the inter-textuality evokes a continuing dialogue on the quest for identity.

Saint Suniti and the Dragon

Part One

‘Saint Suniti and the Dragon’

Suniti Namjoshi’s works explore the dialogic aspects of literature. The ancient oral tales, fairy tales, pagan and Christian mythologies are interpolated and furthered to create the meaning desired by the author. The collections engage in witty, ironic as well as discreet and sophisticated discussions on gender politics and female desire. The feminist renderings subvert the conventional motifs and create a powerful new vision.

Saint Suniti and the Dragon (SD- 1993), consists of two parts i.e. ‘Saint Suniti and the Dragon’ and ‘The Solidarity Fables’. The book was originally written as a single text, and the addition of ‘Solidarity Fables’ was made to increase the volume of the text, as the first part ‘wasn’t long enough to form a book’, as claimed by Namjoshi in The Fabulous Feminist. (148). ‘Saint Suniti and the Dragon’, alludes to Beowulf and the legend of ‘Saint George and the Dragon’ symbolizing good and evil. Saint George, the patron saint of England, was a Christian martyr who lived around 275-303 A.D. The legend ‘Saint George and the Dragon’ states that in a town called Silene, Libya, there dwelt a dragon in a pond. The villagers fed him with sheep and maidens to appease him. When the maidens were exhausted the princess of Silene was to be offered. Hearing this, Saint George came on horseback and fortifying himself with the sign of Cross, he promised to slay the dragon if the villagers converted to Christianity. The villagers agreed and the dragon was killed.

Another legend states that Beowulf is a hero of the Geats who was called by King Hrothgar of Denmark to rid his empire of the dragon, Gloucestor who lived in his watery den. Beowulf slayed Gloucestor and his mother who later came to avenge
her son’s death. Then he went back to his land and became the ruler. Later, he died while ridding his land of a fire-spewing dragon.

Revisioning and re-writing old fairy tales from the feminist perspective is a post-modern impulse. Namjoshi being a post-modern writer not only follows the feminist revisionist project, rather she tries to expand it as she not only considers fairy tales and fables but also canonical texts such as Beowulf. We come across mythical characters like Dragon, Grendel, Gloucester, Arjun etc. associated with the Indian and the Western mythologies. Inversion of Wordsworth, “child is the mother of man” (SD 56), reference to Blake’s ‘Songs of Despair’ (SD 64) to contrast good and evil (as lamb and tiger), references to well-known writers such as, Ezra Pound, Virginia Woolf; Indian poets like Tukaram and Eknath etc. resonate in the entire volume. Namjoshi has written this story into twelve parts, with heroic Suniti as the protagonist in quest of sainthood, giving it a form of an epic.

Suniti’s (mis) adventures with the dragon are presented in twelve brief episodes in the manner of (mock) epic tales. In fact, the thematic motifs of quest and journey and the protagonist’s evolution through her experiences with evil place ‘Saint Suniti and the Dragon’ in the genre of quest novels and link it with Dante’s The Divine Comedy the cult of this genre. (Vijayasree 129)

Namjoshi says, “I was going to write my own Divine Comedy of which this was the Inferno” (The Fabulous Feminist 148). It basically deals with the prevailing human conditions; good and evil, pain, loss, suffering, fear, and mythical characters such as devils and dragons, hell and heaven etc. She desires a world free of evil and fear of patriarchy. Chandra Talpade Mohanty, in Feminism Without Borders, defines feminism:

This is a vision of the world that is pro-sex and- women, a world where women and men are free to live creative lives, in security and with bodily health and integrity, where they are free to chose whom they love, and whom they set up house with, whether they want to have or not have children; a world where pleasure rather than just duty and drudgery determine our choices, where free and imaginative exploration of the mind is a fundamental right; a vision in which economic stability, ecological/ sustainability, racial equality, and the redistribution of wealth from the material basis of people’s well-being.
Finally my vision is one in which democratic and socialist practices and institutions provide the conditions for public participation and decision making for people regardless of economic and social location... (3)

Everything that is suppressing and oppressing is treated as negative. She explores the lives of human beings, their sufferings and the presence of both evil and good within them; and also expresses her concern towards other creatures of the environment and considers their marginalization. She not only emphasizes racial issues but also encompasses the problems related to sex, class and gender discrimination.

Suniti, the protagonist, is an unconventional woman who talks of missionary work, wars, martyrdom etc. She wants to achieve sainthood, but is not sure what sainthood actually is. Thus she wanders from place to place, seeking the path to sainthood. She experiences fear and confusion. She wonders whether she should be a Hindu saint and must worship stones, or a ‘white’ one who asserts superiority, or patronizes lesbianism.

You are my goddess, Suniti said
To the round stone, all belly and no bone.

No, you, you are my goddess, Suniti said
To the white bone, all elegance, finely honed.

Oh you, and you, and you are my goddess, Suniti said
To the women she met, of whom one or two acquiesced,
And one just smiled and shook her head. (SD 3)

She goes through mental trauma regarding universal suffering. She turns to religion believing it to be the medium of solace and beneficence. A new dilemma starts regarding the choice of the emblems of worship. The authority of goddess should be supreme but Suniti cannot find suitable motifs and symbols. The writer uses her own name for the protagonist because she wants to depict her innermost thoughts. In The Fabulous Feminist she says that her choice of the name should make it clear to the readers that the protagonist's 'background is Indian and not necessarily Christian' (147).

Ecofeminism which is closely aligned with radical feminism wants women to play a dominant role in abolishing the destruction of the eco- system as both of them are correlated. Tandon points out:
...patriarchal ways are harmful to women, children and other living beings...ecofeminism suggests that an end to the oppression of women is bound up with ecological values, and that women should be centrally concerned with ending the exploitation of the eco- system. (Tandon 56-57)

Suniti talks to flowers, stones and birds that are the part of the environment and shows her concern for their suffering. The writer personifies the flora and the fauna. Like human- beings, they express emotions, talk, live and die. They feel pain, and experience fear and suffering.

In the afternoon sun the gilded lilies
Began to burn. "Death awaits us.
Death shall amaze, and Death without effort
Shall end our days." (SD 5)

The writer has portrayed lilies as stereotypical women who are ready to suffer without raising their voices. As a true feminist she does not want the oppressed to remain mute, rather she wants them to spurn the oppressors and fight for their rights. The protagonist Suniti pities the flowers and questions their existence. She does not want them to be passive and submissive:

That you should laugh your foolish heads off
In the brilliant sunshine and die without
a scream makes me want to weep, Suniti
informed the pansies, then the irises,... (SD 4)

She later warns the birds to grab their due and free themselves from grief or their survival would be impossible.

"A heart heavy with woe,"
She suddenly informed a sparrow,
"would make you fall you know". (SD 8)

This fable is allegorical in nature. We see fear being compared with a 'mythical or immortal beast' that terrorizes and cannot be killed. As a woman, a lesbian and a woman of colour, the writer has faced a series of fears; fear of being discriminated against, fear of being marginalized, of having no identity and of getting no recognition. The readers are exhorted to explore her fears through the protagonist 'Suniti'. Suniti identifies fear with a dragon and aspires to be saint. But as a saint and a woman she did not dare to kill the dragon as it would go against patriarchal norms.
"... it was patently absurd that she as a saint, or even as a woman, should have to climb up its flanks and stick a flag in its body. She would not do it". (SD 12) Her fear penetrated deep inside her psyche and she has to bear it as a legislation of patriarchy. "It leaped into her body. Liquid panic slithered through her, invaded the most remote and tiny capillaries". (SD 11) To harm someone is evil, and Suniti who is going to attain sainthood does not want either the dragon or the saints and civilians to harm one another. As killing is evil, Suniti the saint cannot terminate the dragon.

Grendel the baby dragon comes to swallow Suniti. "The monsters are not out of the desire to be evil, but rather out of the need to survive" (Breiter 16). Grendel’s mother has to feed her baby as a maternal responsibility. Suniti’s pleas to spare her as a fellow woman are not heeded.

"Willing or unwilling, don’t really matter," the Mama replied. "He’s got to be fed and that’s about it." Then she looked cunning, and in a fair imitation of Suniti’s voice, added slyly, "But surely, Sunny, as a fellow woman you ought to be willing to aid and abet?" (SD 16)

The conversation between the two women highlights that solidarity between the two women is not possible as ‘Mama’ is an agent of patriarchy. Breiter, talks about the two binaries existing in the story i.e. hero/monster and feminist/patriarchal binary:

Namjoshi uses the dialogues between the characters as a point of intersection between the two systems of order, and the result illustrates that neither system- that of the hero/monster binary or that of the feminist/patriarchal binary- is completely functional.” (17)

The refusal of Grendel to consume men and his preference for women signifies that women are at a higher risk of being marginalized. His refusal to eat Suniti saying that she was not a ‘proper woman’ signifies that as Suniti was a lesbian, she is unfit for the patriarchy. Lesbians reject heteronormativity and thus, cannot be the victims of male dominance while, Grendel’s mother is symbolic of women who suppress and impair the dignity of other women by becoming agents of patriarchy.

Suniti wanders around in search of sainthood. The idea imparted by saints that sainthood requires full and complete devotion of life and that saints live in solitude and obscurity make her sad. Namjoshi wants women to live fulfilling and independent lives. Sainthood is full of problems and dilemmas. The dynamics of sainthood are elusive. The wanderer seems to get nowhere near her destination. Revelation,
enlightenment, descent of knowledge that happened to other saints do not happen to
her. Namjoshi not only deconstructs the myth of canonical archetypes but also the
notion of identity fixation, and ultimately concludes that construction of an identity,
even if it is that of a saint or a dragon, is a subjective experience. She later says that
labeling something with a fixed characteristic is biased and purely a patriarchal
construct. Breiter points out:

Suniti’s intense contemplation of the supposed prerequisites for
saintliness, along with her unexpected relationships with “monsters”,
challenges the conventions of the hero/ villain binary, and all that each
category of that dichotomy entails”... By complicating this binary she
draws the reader’s attention to the social construction of such literary-
and indeed mythic and archetypal- roles. ‘St. Suniti’ is, in part, an
exploration of such social constructions, and significantly addresses
the politics of identity. (3-4)

The dragons and monsters are the universal symbols associated with evil. In
‘St. Suniti and the Dragon’, these mythical creatures do not possess evil attributes.
They are not blood thirsty and they want to befriend Suniti- the protagonist. Identities
are interchangeable, as we see,

Suniti slipped and slithered through the mud. The slime crept about
her. The slime transfigured her. She probably looked like Grendel’s
Mum. She was Grendel’s Mum? In panic she fell and groped in the
mud: where was her sense of heroic purpose? (SD 57)

Suniti’s ‘transfiguring’ and resembling Grendel’s Mum suggests that a saint,
too, could acquire the traits of evil. In ‘On the extinctions of Dragons’ (SD 67-69), an
elegy is composed by the dragon in which things start losing their identities:

“That night no nightingale said a word.

          Ordinary birds,

        Busy racketing all the day long,

          Strangely

        Forgot their ebullience, and walked

               rather than flew... (SD 69)

Namjoshi has created a gynocentric world, where everything is viewed
keeping women at the centre. All her characters are female. However Grendel (the
baby monster) is a male; her angels, devils, dragons, jeweled serpent etc. are
addressed as ‘she’. Namjoshi, thus satirizes political jargon. In the third part of the
tale, “’Tis the Eye of Childhood...”, we encounter ‘Sir Suniti and the Fearful
Dragon’ (SD 9), as with evolution, and progress in the patriarchal world, she gains a
male title.

‘Saint Suniti and the Dragon’ crosses all the generic conventions. Namjoshi’s
technique of writing is such that she has written the text both in verse and prose.
Sometimes there is the addition of diary entries and postcard messages breaking the
manuscript in the middle of the text. Namjoshi confessed in the war diary, dated 19
Jan. 1991 (SD 39) that she was embarrassed by her book as it only deals with the
imaginary and mythical battlefields and not with the real world. Thus, these war
diaries are a compensation for that real world destruction caused by both Nature and
man. Namjoshi criticizes Nature and considers it as one of the sources of disaster. She
talks of cyclones, earth quakes and famines, and wonders, “Why has it happened?
Why do these things happen over and over again”? (SD 52) The writer utters these
words after getting frustrated by the nature of the world.

The diary entries refer to the 1991 war between Israel and Iraq. The writer
criticizes war and calls it evil as it is associated to the destruction of human life. Wars
are not only responsible for the oppression of common man, but also for the
suppression of soldiers in the name of martyrdom. Namjoshi, questioning the
imbalance of power, says that the rulers acquiring high positions, order the soldiers to
fight and sacrifice their lives for the sake of their country. The writer juxtaposes
multiple power-centers and exposes the absurdity of each. Heroism is stripped of the
notions of valour, sacrifice and nobility and treated as a ‘pose’.

And the soldiers, the young men and the young women?
They are not posing either. Even if they wanted to, they
haven’t the time. They haven’t claimed that they’re St
George. (SD 40)

She further adds that wars are fought by human beings irrespective of their
sex; and thus, evil lies in human beings and not in their sex. In the war diary, dated 23
Jan. 1991, she illustrates:

The devil is both me and the other, both familiar and alien. The devil is
human and inhuman. That is why I feel a sense of relief. It is necessary
to have a devil in order to fight a war. (SD 41)
Human beings commit evil due to the exhortation of devil. In ... ‘Fears a painted devil’ (SD 45), the jeweled serpent was not the cause of evil. It was Suniti herself who tried to ‘cajole’ the snake to perform evil and share the blame of sin along with her. The marginalization of reptiles is a common theme in literature. The fable recapitulates the myth of genesis. Suniti believes that evil and good are illusions, so she choses to be a poet, as poets have the license and ability to create a world of good and evil of their own.

Namjoshi fundamentally questions the appropriacy of the tales told to children. Fairly tales and fables heard in childhood shape the notion of right and wrong and influence one’s adult roles. She propagates feminine solidarity and attempts to find solutions to the dilemmas of contemporary existence. She defends women freedom to make a sexual choice. Her cross-referencing is both artistic and purposeful.

**Part Two**

‘The Solidarity Fables’

‘The Solidarity Fables’ form the second half of the book *Saint Suniti and the Dragon*. These fables are fairy tales and myths which have been recast and re-written from a feminist perspective. The title ‘Solidarity Fables’ is ironic. “The feminist movement was beginning to fade by then and the title is a reflection on the lack of solidarity among feminists”, comments Namjoshi in *The Fabulous Feminist* (148). With the issue of lesbianism as its primary concern, the text deals with the history of patriarchy and rise of feminism, compulsory heterosexuality, ecofeminism and power imbalance. Savita Goel points out:

> The ‘Solidarity Fables’ deal with social systems, cultural and literary traditions, power and domination through subtle inversion of stereotypes and the writer’s disapproval of the replica of patriarchal power hierarchy in the feminist groups. (Goel)

The world before feminism offers many examples about the power and might of men over women. But the evidence for patriarchy is not universal. Historically women have enjoyed the positions of queens, owned property and served as clergy, while patriarchy or the ‘absolute tyranny’ of man over woman has a history of its own. Gerda Lerner says, “patriarchy as a system is historical: it has a beginning in
history...it can be ended by historical process” (Freedman 18). When men and women lived as hunters and food gatherers they had different duties to perform and when they shifted to settled agriculture, there emerged class and gender relations. The advancement in agriculture, the barter system and the rising social hierarchy led to the emergence of patriarchal families. Men exercised control in both public and private spheres, while women retained duties at home. The fable ‘Bluebeard’s Way’ (SD 123-26), takes us back to the history of patriarchy and the treatment of women by men. Namjoshi acts as a historical feminist and says that after the advancement of agriculture, men required more labour (children) to increase the productivity of the crop. Thus, a bride became a commodity that was purchased after paying bride-price to her family so as to increase the number of children. Women were captured in war raids in order to increase reproductive labour.

...economists say that from the male point of view cows and women are a form of property. He did not hoard cows. Cleaning up shit, the problems of space, the awkwardness of size, in short, the logistics, just weren’t worth it. And, in any case, he considered women the superior species. His house was honeycombed with hundreds of cells, and in each of these cells his women were fed and fattened and tranquillized according to need.

The ownership of property is a serious matter, and the piece of property is eternal vigilance. (SD 123)

Female sexuality became a commodity, but the mutation in Bluebeard’s later generation and their declaration, “those who were property were no longer property”, (SD 126) led to the liberation of women and the beginning of women’s movement. Education made women aware of their rights and prepared them to voice their problems. Namjoshi’s version offers a larger female world in comparison to the original text. Bluebeard’s women are furnished with individual cells so that they could not interact, intrigue or plan. The liberation of cows provides a new conclusion.

‘Mother Goose, Sister Goose and the Market- Led Farmer’ (SD 121- 22), deals with women’s awareness and the beginning of feminism. The statement of the geese sisters, “Make war on farmers”, deals with the plans of women to attack patriarchy.

Mary Wollstonecraft, recommended education for both men and women. She challenged long standing assumptions about female inferiority, especially in terms of
intellect, and emphasized that women should learn skills rather than rely on beauty or emotional influence to survive. Many women tried to put her theory into practice. The monkeys in the fable ‘Social Theory’ (SD 118-119) and the fish in ‘Manners’ (SD 75), are concerned with the same issue. These women tried hard to uplift themselves but were not welcomed and rejected by the male dominated world. Their intelligence was questioned and their abilities were not recognized. The Moralist in ‘Calvin versus Darwin versus the Penguin’ (SD 96), considered penguins lazy and blamed them as “Penguins Cannot Fly!” and also called them “Congenitally Indolent” (SD 96). The girl in ‘The Guitar Player’ (SD 97-98), also wants her skills to be acknowledged but the two passers-by do not appreciate her. ‘Art is Long’ (SD 103) and ‘Gracefully for Grebes’ (SD 120) are the wish fulfillment of Namjoshi where women are praised and acquire high positions in society.

Namjoshi is of the opinion that women can create self and identity for each other. Patriarchy prevails everywhere and to reduce its dominance, she adheres to Adrienne Rich’s defiance of “compulsory heterosexuality”. As lesbians live outside heterosexual institution, they obviously oppose patriarchy. In her fables ‘Beauty Incarnate and the Supreme Singer’ (SD108-109), ‘By the River’ (SD 110-111), ‘The Two Ducks and a Tortoise’ (SD 81), ‘Australian Notebook’ (SD 104) and ‘The Function of Friendship’ (SD117), Namjoshi celebrates her lesbianism. Vijayasree refers to Caroline Halliday, a lesbian poet who comments that lesbian eroticism, “...is not only about connections and explorations. It is also about celebration, about breaking taboos, naming what is and what is ours”. (Vijayasree 59)

The author sympathizes with lesbians who go through mental trauma. These women often become the objects of ridicule in society and in their own families. They suffer from homophobia, as in a phallocentric society they are still considered as deviants, a threat to religious values and family stability. They are ostracized, and pressurized to accept compulsory heterosexuality. Namjoshi too did not dare to confess her sexual choice before her family as she feared disapproval. However she later confessed it in Goja: An Autobiographical Myth. The lesbian daughters of Ganga, in ‘Blood and Water’ (SD 114-115), were also rejected by their mother as they became the source of disgrace for her when they came out of the closet regarding their choice.

Heteronormativity, in the opinion of the author, requires the woman to be subjugated by the man. Sex between man and woman contains some political motive
that could take woman to the realm of suppression. Kate Millet in *Sexual Politics* (1970) says:

Sex is not a purely biological and isolated act. To a large extent, it has a potential aspect, which is quiet often neglected. In Patriarchy, men dominate women in bed, as much as they do in other walks of life. (Tandon 74)

Like Millet, Namjoshi, too, reconceptualizes female sexuality. She not only considers the sexual pleasure of women but also wants to adopt non reproductive sex. While in a heterosexual relationship, women remain at risk of pregnancy which could force them into child bearing and child rearing; engaging them in duties and drudgery of motherhood and house- wives that are in Betty Freidan’s words, ‘endless, monotonous and unrewarding’, as we see in ‘Bluebeard’s’ fable:

He attended to his women twice a day, once in the morning and once each evening. The analogy to milking was constantly in mind, and also to farming, to digging, to ploughing, to hoeing and to all that pertained to animal husbandry. His methods were efficacious and the women fertile... (SD 123)

The wolf and virgin, in “Wolf” (SD 86) and ‘Subsequent History’ (SD 87), were not allowed to live according to their own desires and were also forced to accept heterosexuality. Thus they had to live a hidden and obscure life. “They were thoroughly lost… the forest had swallowed them” (SD 86) and they “just walked on until, at last, they entered a realm that is, not as yet familiar to us.” (SD 87) Fairy tales propagate patriarchy. ‘Wolves’ in these tales are depicted as monstrous and evil that terrorize weak/ submissive maidens and allow men to pose as heroes. Namjoshi deconstructs the myth of wolves and presents them friendly with maidens. Vijayasree comments:

Namjoshi’s ‘Wolf’ is an attack on stereotyping creatures. The wicked wolf is, after all, a construct created to let the young men emerge as heroes. But if the maiden were to make friends with wolves, then the heroes become redundant. (Vijayasree 137)

In ‘Solidarity Fables’ ecofeminist aspects can be discerned. Eco- feminism explores the relationship between human beings and nature, including animals. Karen Warren, an ecofeminist, argues that there are important connections between the unjustified marginalization of women and nature. She points out:
“prevailing dualisms in western philosophy as a source of conceptual and practical domination. Men/ women, culture/ nature, mind/ body, reason/ emotion exist as hierarchical dualisms in western thought with man, culture, mind and reasons having higher value than woman, nature, body and emotion.” (McHugh 33)

Namjoashi recognizes nature’s agency and situates human beings in ecological terms, thus breaking down the human/ nature dualism (including animals). Hence, the virgin preferred the wolf over men in ‘Wolf’ (SD 85) and ‘Subsequent History’ (SD 86); the mistress enjoyed her relationship with a mare in ‘By the River’ (SD 110–111) and chose her to be her partner; the Cockatoo unites with a woman in ‘Australian Notebook’ (SD 104–105). Women identify themselves with nature and animals in most of the narratives. Anne Susan Koshy talks about the use of animal fantasy in ‘Solidarity Fables’ as a means of comfort that acts as a substitute to the existing patriarchal conditions:

‘The Solidarity Fables’ makes use of fantasy particularly animal fantasy to explore feminist issues and present an alternative system to the prevailing patriarchal ideology. The fact that man’s relationship with the rest of the animal kingdom strikes a deep chord of imaginative recognition in the human consciousness may account for the continued popularity for the beast tales. (Koshy 252)

The fables such as ‘Auto/ Biog.’ (SD 106) and ‘Kittiwake’ (SD 107), portray that the animal world is better than the human. These fables mock at patriarchy that does not allow women to live according to their own wishes and desires, whereas animals such as gulls and butterflies are independent creatures. “Then the Black Butterfly, intrepid and unsteady, weaving her way through galactic daisies, must have felt as powerful and pointless as any spaceship.” (SD 106) and, “It was the interface of ocean and the cold blue air- on which she herself circled- the pattern upon pattern, the shifting and sliding…” (SD 107)

The writer has made use of animal imagery in most of her fables. Animals such as hedgehog, fish, duck, tortoise, donkey, wolf, sow, pelican, penguin, owl, crow, wren etc. possess human qualities. They speak like humans and also act like them. The animal imagery is symbolically related to lesbian existence, gender, class and race.
The title of this volume is ironical as it deals with the 'lack of solidarity' among different feminist groups. The irony of the title lies in the fables such as 'Lost Leader' (SD 73- 74) and 'That Shaggy Look' (SD 83- 84). In the 'Lost Leader', the writer makes fun of a refined hedgehog who takes charge of enlightening the downtrodden groups of hedgehogs. The manners in which the hedgehogs behave in the feast lead the refined hedgehog to abandon them.

The Refined Hedgehog lived quietly. She had lost her ambition and seldom went out. Nevertheless, as it happened, she did go down in history, not quite as she had intended, but as the Legendary Leader and First Casualty of the Hedgehog cause. (SD 74)

'The Shaggy Look', deals with the keenness of a feminist activist making everything a trend. The wild mare left the bourgeois as she was considered 'sloven' by them due to her unkempt look. Her rejection of the bourgeois symbolizes the prevailing differences among various feminist groups. They imitate the patriarchal order of power positions, comments Vijayasree, "these fables express Namjoshi's disappointment with the replication of patriarchal power hierarchy in feminist groups." (Vijayasree 136)

'Solidarity Fables' explore the issue of power imbalance. Like the Marxist or Socialist feminists, the writer argues that the equality of opportunity can never be possible in society as long as there are basic differences in wealth, privilege and power. She not only criticizes patriarchy but also mocks capitalism. The fables such as 'The Promise of King Hilar' (SD 78- 80), 'One of Us' (SD 112- 113) and 'Pelican' (SD 91- 93), deal with the same theme. Her analysis of power politics traces the effect of power on human relationships in society. 'The Promise of King Hilar' is ironical as the writer portrays the King making tea for a poor woman. Through this fable, Namjoshi removes the gap between the elite and the poor. In 'Pelican', "...the Pelican just shrugged and ignored the fish", as the former is privileged and proud of her status.

Being a diasporic Indian writer, the question of race is a huge issue for Namjoshi. Apart from being marginalized as a woman and as a lesbian, she had also been the victim of racial discrimination. Racism is a type of oppression that values one race over the other. Linda Martin Alcoff, defines racism as "a negative value or set of values projected as an essential attribute onto a group whose members are
defined through genealogical connection, sharing some origin, and who are demarcated on the basis of some visible features.” (McHugh 111)

The sow in ‘Ordinary Ears’ (SD 88-89), was proud of her eighth piglet for having distinguished ears and said, “they are made of the purest and most durable silk”; the red fish in the fable ‘Schooling’ (SD 90), with blue dots was considered as “Foreign” by other ordinary grey fish. The hippo in ‘Higher Education’ (SD 94-95), was not able to adjust in the environment with the ducks and left the place. The title ‘Solidarity Fables’ is used ironically by the writer in order to highlight the differences among the feminists. It also depicts the lack of solidarity and harmony among people of the world as a result of race, class, sex and gender discrimination.

Through these fables, the writer questions sexual politics and challenges the patriarchal constructs. She is against forceful adoption of heterosexuality, but she does not propagate lesbianism, as the choice of one’s own sex is purely a personal issue. She attempts to reorganize the world with the re-writing of old fables and fairy tales, and interrogates the marginalization of the subalterns in a patriarchal society and inspires them to struggle for identity and autonomy.

**Building Babel**

*Building Babel* (BB-1996), as the title indicates, deals with the construction of a tower or a building. But this construction is not concrete, rather philosophical, in which raw material such as bricks and cement represent lofty ideas, imagination and fantasy. The text is suggestive of the process of development of a new culture of writing that is gynocentric in nature with Web as a medium. Revision, re-writing, fantasizing, mythicizing and de-mythicizing are the basic concerns of the text. It also takes up the issues related to power hierarchy, gender roles and multiple identities.

In patriarchy, literature was not considered to be women’s arena. Women are considered incapable of producing any form of art. Robert Southey in one of the famous letters to Charlotte Bronte says, ‘Literature is not the business of a woman’s life, and it cannot be.’ (Southey 110) It was considered the monopoly of and suitable to the caliber of men to reproduce thoughts on paper. Edward Said discusses the masculine power of pen and uses Gerard Manley Hopkin’s metaphor of ‘penis’ symbolizing ‘pen power’, which says that male sexuality is not just analogically but actually the essence of literary power. The poet’s pen is in some sense ‘a penis’
metaphorically as it is a kind of male gift, and marks off men from women, the procreation of one’s ideas on paper. (Said 162) Male writers developed their own culture of writing in which the role of women are marginalized and excluded from the polis, hence decentred, disoriginated, deinstitutionalized, etc., their relation to integrity and textuality, desire and authority, displays structurally important differences from the universal position. Thus, feminist philosophers such as Helene Cixous, Louis Irigaray, Virginia Woolf etc., perceived the need to develop a culture of women’s writing emphasizing their own psychological, sexual, emotional and social experiences unfettered by any phobias. Helene Cixous says:

"I shall speak about women’s writing: about what it will do. Woman must write herself: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies- for the same reasons, by the same law, with the same fatal goal. Woman must put herself into the text- as into the world and into history- by her own movement. (Cixous n pag)"

Namjoshi follows the footprints of such feminists and makes an attempt to build a new culture in order to provide a position and to raise the status of women in literature. She emphasizes on cyber space as a medium to extend this culture. Innovative ideas are born out of the existing patterns and the new literature is produced. The web provides an infinite number of literary works which in turn become the source of motivation and inspiration to the reader to help him/her to become the writer. She is of the view that old material facilitates the production of new with the use of tools such as, re- visioning and re- writing.

Building Babel is Namjoshi’s response to Harold Bloom’s view, “from the sons of Homer to the sons of Ben Johnson, poetic influence (has) been described as a filial relationship” i.e. a relationship of ‘sonship’. Namjoshi inverts the statement and presents the idea of Sisterhood and Motherhood. She wants to create a culture where the author is a woman, a progenitor and the procreator. The novel begins with a dual introduction and a Prologue/ Epilogue that provides the gist of the novel and makes the reader ready to encounter its plot. We are introduced to the familiar characters of the old fairy tales, myths and fables with a little retention and a little inversion of the original. Little Red, Alice, Rap- Rap or Rapunzel, Mad Med or Medusa, Snow White, Cinders or Cinderella, Rose Green, Sister Sol, Lady Shy, Black Piglet, Verity and Charity etc. are the main characters of the novel. They have been evoked from their
original sources in order to get rid of the stereotypes and biases attached to them. Little Red is fed up of the colour red; Alice is deprived of her sister by the Rabbit in the Looking Glass, but is a powerful woman; Cinders goes with the Prince to leap from rags to riches and loses her own ambition, Medusa is a lady of her own will who is not ashamed of projecting her sexuality:

And Little R roared, "I’m covered in red. Red blood of Grandam. Red blood of Wolf. Even my own red blood, probably. I don’t like being Red. You’ve stereotyped me."

Alice stepped forward, "There is a problem. The problem is I haven’t any sisters. I am unique."

"Well, but my dear-" Cinders simply- "The problem is we haven’t much power of our own, you know. We have to be someone, do something."

"The problem is we’ve all been typecast!" (BB 28–29)

The writer presents these women with a liberal and modern essence. They have the caliber to distort and deconstruct the myths associated to them and the capability to interrogate, meditate and investigate the cause of their identity fixation. They desire to re-establish the notion of fluid identity in order to get rid of all patriarchal biases. They blame God for their misery who in His omnipotence decided their fate. Later, they blame man, and lastly their mothers as they are the agents of patriarchy. But ultimately they conclude that literature is the root cause. Historically, literature has been male-centered. Men write for men from the point of view of men, and the women were put on the periphery. Virtues, morality and chastity were the chief concerns of readings for women. Little girls were fed with fables and fairy tales as prototypes associated with male supremacy, women’s subordination, beauty, marriage, heteronormativity etc. Namjoshi’s manipulation of the art of story-telling highlights the horrific realities behind subversion, silencing and marginalization.

The writer thus, distorts the notion of canonical archetypes and encourages the construction of patriarchy free culture in literature so as to redeem the dignity of women and deconstruct the male-constructed models. Thus, she invites women to join hands and discover the idea of Sisterhood i.e. the emblem of solidarity. She finds Sisterhood above all relationships as it provides the freedom to women to share, mythicize, weave stories and fantasize. The novel begins with the whim and fancy of women and the idea of sisterhood. They keep each other company and invent myths.
Snow White boasts of her power and strength to her sister; Rose Green expresses her desire to be a free lesbian and be the master of the whole world; while Alice prefers cat to be her sister and expresses her love for animals. (BB 9-10) Namjoshi presents her characters’ yearning for sisterhood. They are unhappy and alone, and want company to eliminate their misery. Sister Sol is lonely and desires inanimate objects and non-human beings to be her sisters:

“BEING LONELY
She says to the moon,
Are you my sister?
To the frog, Are you my sister?
Even to the lily, so remote, so cool,
Could you?
Please?
Be my sister!” (BB 11)

Lady Shy’s sister’s demand of blood night after night is ironic as it symbolizes disintegration and differences among sisters, while The Black Piglet finds Death following her forever as her sister companion. All the sisters decide to cultivate a new culture with the use of new words, new genres and new ideas. They remark:

“The problem is words!”
“We need new words
“Yes! Words that are strong and slippery as eels…”
“Words we can eat!”
“Words we can drink!”
“That won’t poison us.”
“That will poison our enemies?”
“’Enemy’ is a word.”
“Why so it is.”
“We will build a great edifice out of malleable words.”
“We will cultivate a culture.”
“We will grow a common language.”
“The Sisterhood of Women will
Mean something!” (BB 29)

Sisterhood has been mythicized in old fairy tales. Jealousy, envy and competition among sisters, and specifically among step-sisters were the chief
concerns of those tales. In order to demythicize the concept, Namjooshi in “Piece for Soloists” (BB 23), inverses the original tale and replaces Cinder’s sisters with brothers who compel her to wear the shoe and be with the Prince in order to ‘seek preferment’. The myth says:

Step- sisters compete, but then so do sisters. They compete even harder. But this girl, Cindy, or Cinders if you like, had two brothers. These two brothers were astute and ambitious. “Cindy”, they said, “since the shoe fits, you’ve got to wear it. We seek preferment. The Prince would make an excellent patron.” (BB 23)

The inversion of the tale projects brothers, not competitive but indifferent towards the ambitions of their sisters. The revision of the original tale of Rapunzel is ironical as Rap- Rap presents her sisters envying her heroism:

…and all my sisters can join me. They will say, “Ah yes. Yes! She was the first! She is a hero!” But I fear in the end they’ll learn to accuse me. “A witch”, They will say.” (BB 23)

The rewriting of myths is not only a blissful task for the writer but it also creates new meanings and innovative ideas that leave the text open ended and want the reader to decide its meaning. Susan Sellers in one of her essays, “Myth and Fairy Tale in Contemporary Women’s Fiction” points out:

The rewriting of myths enables us to envisage re- writings not only as pleasurable reversals or ingenious tinkering but as new embroideries, adding fresh images and colours to radically alter the picture. Feminist rewriting could thus include ironic mimicry and clever twists as well as a whole gamut of tactics that would open the myth from the inside as well as out, leaving in place enough of the known format to provide evocative points of reflection for its reader but also encompassing different possibilities and other points of view. (Sellers 188)

The writer wants to amend and reform the contents of old fairy tales through re- visioning and fantasizing. She pulls the women characters of earlier literature, specifically the characters of old fairy tales and fables out of the bog of androcentric world and fulfills her desire by making them built a gynocentric culture. She invents a new culture of writing without taking care of genre and conventions. Her writings are notoriously difficult to read as they glide from word play through dense allusion to disruption of all the ‘rules’ including those of grammar, punctuation and page- layout.
The text itself is a monument of a new civilization in which multiple women characters of multiple tales have been invented and reinvented keeping in mind their aptitude, desires and freedom. Like her earlier novel, Mothers of Maya Diip, she continues to play with multiple sexual identities. Cinders and Little Red possess dual sexual identities. They prefer heteronormativity in order to gain power position outside the Babel, yet celebrate womanhood within the Babel. They want to play safe and hence, form alliance with men. Solitude and The Black Piglet appear to be partners who weave stories about Love, Death and Time. Alice deprived of her sister prefers Cat over men. The cat describes the scene of the tavern focusing on different sexes. Apart from the men, there were two women ‘immigrants... who had not as yet achieved the status of women’. (BB129) Identity is not only inflicted but is also acquired by choice and according to the need. Chela Sandoval, in one of her essays insists that “identities are not necessarily imposed on us but that we may self-consciously choose among them, switching at times from an emphasis on our gender to an emphasis on our race or sexuality.” (Sandoval 1-24)

The idea of Pantheism i.e. the omnipresence of gods in everything logically turns an ordinary object extraordinary and provides it with multiple identities. She invents ‘Crone Kronos’ i.e. ‘Time’, as a goddess for it has great significance for poets. As the sisters are feminist writers, they adore and worship her because they are aware that the Babel will be built in the course of time or Crone Kronos. Crone Kronos makes a writer’s work eternal, and also brings about the decline and destruction of an artifact. The writer portrays her as the ‘preserver’ and the ‘destroyer’ like Lord Shiva in Hindu mythology. The sisters praise her as she brings about changes in Culture after revisioning and reinventing the old chronicles. Once The Black Piglet poses a question to Sister Sol, “...But what does Crone Kronos do with your stories?”/ “Oh, she re-invents them. But then that’s pretty much what she does with everything.” (BB 41- 42) Crone Kronos is multi-faceted in the myths of Sister Sol and The Black Piglet. There is shifting of identities as sometimes she is projected as an antelope, a caterpillar and Piglet’s Mum, while some other time she is an infection and a cat that eats up her kittens. The Piglet and Sol mutate and transmute in the myths associated with them. The identity of The Black Piglet also alters as a Black Prince and later as a Black Prince.

We need long twines of adjectives to trace our complex selves by race, religion, sexuality, physical ability, ethnicity etc. Post modern critics point out that the
ideas about fixed race and sex have often been used to restrict the rights of women and the marginalized. Donna Haraway, who calls all identities “fabricated hybrids”, says that our consciousness of gender, race and class “is an achievement forced on us by the terrible historical experiences of...patriarchy, colonialism, and capitalism.” (Haraway 150–55)

The novel seems to be the historical description of the three waves of Feminism with transformations and differentiations in ideologies. It begins with the decision of Sisters to build a Babel and to cultivate a women-centered culture in literature and writing. The second phase is the reign of Queen Alice who, irrespective of gender opens the gate of Babel for men as well, while the third phase is the age of Medusa who is radical in thought. The story starts with the invention of a new culture of common-language for women. Each of the sisters was given various tasks to perform in its construction. The need of the permission of the Prince ‘to build and access to material in order to recycle or invent’ illustrates that it is men’s writings that provided the raw material to women to produce their own piece of work as there were forefathers of literature and not the foremothers. The material provided by the Prince, ‘more garbage and less useful products’, symbolizes the unworthy readings offered to women. The raw material is categorized and piled up into ‘Words’ and ‘Not- Words’; technical equipments such as T.V., computers, television towers; and into “Contributions”. Things were sorted and resorted again and again. The blame on The Black Piglet for being a non-sister and offending their goddess develops into a controversy among the sisters and is indicative of the differences of opinions and lack of solidarity created among feminists.

Language plays a dominant role in building the culture of writing. The sisters in order to build their own language define new rules of grammar. Namjoshi raises the position of a marginalized animal like Cat and makes her a norm setter, as it is she who formulates the rules. To point out the differences in language, she makes fun of Indian English for using Present continuous instead of Simple present tense:

“Surely you are knowing what I am meaning”, the cat explained (unhindered by any trace of liberal guilt), “-Indian English. He/ she/ it/ they/ will always be doing; they will never do, whatever it was they might have been doing.” The cat grinned. “Will that do to be going on with?” (BB 67)
The Black Piglet dies and Alice takes over. Alice decides to include men and levy taxes on the creation of artifacts in public. The older generation’s opposition to these policies signifies their unwillingness to change. The alterations made by the second generation leads to the building of a new Babel that intends to provide equality to all, including men, on the condition that they change their sexuality and acquire womanhood. Lady Shy explains it to Verity:

“The Queen is proposing to open Babel. The immigrants will be ‘men’ till they have been assimilated into the society of Babblers, at which time, at least some of them will definitely be accorded the status of women.”

Later Snow White says, “Men are not men. That will be their designation when they first enter Babel. The Queen does not distinguish between men and rabbits. All are welcome, provided they’ve been screened and have scored a sufficient number of points on a suitable test. Babel will benefit by a trained workforce, which Babel has not had the expense of having educated.” (BB 112-13)

Namjoshi carries on multiple cultural traditions. We see one culture being imposed on the other. The second generation feminist writers show their concern towards power politics and power hierarchy. Queen Alice confers ranks and titles on her disciples—Lady Shy becomes Lord Shy, Keeper of the Memes, Verity’s daughter is given the title of Lady Verisimilitude, Rose Green and Snow White are made ‘duchies’, while Rap- Rap and the others are commended for past services. Queen Alice is definite of the power and strength of men. She tells Solly, “I am of the opinion—again in general—that men outrank women.” (BB 110) She also addresses Lady Shy as ‘Lord Shy’, and the older women as ‘gentlemen’ in order to provide strength to them. Unlike the women of first generation, she wants to achieve fame among the masses. She had a pageantry coronation in order to declare her supremacy. She addresses her subjects and says, “O women of Babel you have sanctified me, I successor and descendent of The Black Piglet, am now Crone Kronos’ representative in Babel.” (BB 107) She further says, “Time have changed. I am the ruler. You obey.” (BB 111) She wants to give entry to men in the Babel, whereas Sol is against her ideology. Alice and Sol are the representatives of two contradictory cultures. Sol believes men possess inflexible identity and violent temperaments. She says:
Men have diseased identities... men with their mutated genes and memes, which have not mutated sufficiently. They are troglodytes still... They worship power and find the victory of battle heroic. They batter one another, they batter piglets, parakeets and peonies, they batter women, they batter the whole Crone Kronos’ creation. This they perceive as the exercise of power... (BB 113-14)

According to Sol, men are the oppressors, the eaters, while women are the oppressed and the eaten. They have the innate desire to exercise control over women, thus their entry in the Babel polluted the latter. There occurs a massive upheaval of noble women of ranks as they demanded the power over their own work of art. Corruption, chaos and disintegration leads to the destruction of Babel. Lawlessness and stealing become rampant. Instead of exploring and accessing, writers began to imitate:

Babel had changed. Queen Alice’s palace overtopped the Temple of Crone Kronos. There were some fine mansions with pleasant gardens, and there were acres of slums- well, not exactly slums, but a growth of mean, crooked houses with narrow streets and low standards of cleanliness. There were fields, farms and country estates. Oh yes, and in genes and memes there was a roaring black market. The meme racket worked through downloading mostly. (BB 123- 24)

Women started mingling with men who have not achieved womanhood. Alice had to take strict measures of sterilizing the beach with some sanitizing agent as it got polluted with “Genes- sperm mostly... floated in, in plastic capsules’. There were riots of course, and demands for civil rights, particularly the right to bear children, and demands for a constitution and a reconstitution of the common wealth- all that stuff.” (BB 124) Namjoshi expresses her unhappiness and misery at the destruction of Babel i.e. the centre of women’s culture. The division of Babel into factions, disintegration of ideas, and lack of solidarity among feminists fills her with grief. The cat says:

I don’t like watching women- grown women- tearing each other to pieces, committing stupidities, committing crimes, and all in the name of Crone Kronos, The Black Piglet, Queen Alice, The God of Babel, The Glory of Womanhood. (BB 139)
At the death of Alice, the writer once again deconstructs the myth associated to Queens and upper class and says that elite class also possess emotions, bear pain, live life and face death. Before her death, Queen Alice calls the cat in order to get her elegy published. She tells her, “I’m dying. What else is there? I too am a person, not just a queen. I too was alive.” (BB 136) Her elegy makes it clear that none is left untouched with the advent of time. It is ironic that for her whole life Crone Kronos is not recognized by Alice, but in her elegy she calls her the ‘true love’ who has provided comfort to her. She associates everything with Time:

Time was my true love, time my grief.
A handsome young man? No, he changed,
Changed for his pleasure to a white rabbit.

Time was my solace, time my relief.
A kindly grandam? An absent mum?
Returned to comfort me, feed
And fend for me, to the end (BB 137)

The third generation phase is ruled by Mad Med, who is the ‘Medusa’ of Greek mythology. She is presented as an unfortunate and miserable woman, ruined by other mythological archetypes such as Poseidon and Athene. In Greek myth of Ovid, Medusa is raped by Neptune in the temple of Minerva, and thus, the outraged Goddess turned her into a monster. The myth also says that Perseus beheaded her, and ‘the swift-winged’ Pegasus and his brother were born from her blood. Then, Medusa’s head acquired power to turn all those men who looked at it into stone. (Ovid 106)

The writer calls her the stupidest of all as she tries to grope in the dark when everything has been destructed. “Mad Medusa raped by Poseidon, betrayed by Athene, slaughtered with the aid of her own powers, surely the stupidest woman on earth, examines what is left.” (BB 141) Namjoshi portrays her as a baby playing with and refitting alphabetical blocks. She aspires to rebuild the Babel. She is an optimistic woman who even after being ruined seeks someone who is able to provide comfort to her. And it is the ‘mother’ who is the sole source of solace and consolation. Thus she finds Mme Earth, more comforting and associates her with the maternal aspect of Crone Kronos. Being an Indian, Namjoshi confers upon ‘earth’ the status of a mother i.e. motherland as a provider and a supporting agent. Due to the destruction of Babel, the inhabitants of Babel required love and comfort that could only be provided by a
mother. The writer adheres to her previous work, *Mothers of Maya Diip*, in which the 'gallant' demanded Mothers in order to acquire love and peace. In *Babel*, both Medusa and her 'lover boy', Red Jr. yearn for maternal affection. Medusa wants her lover boy to be caring, while Red Jr. expects her to behave in the same fashion. The continuous reiteration of the line, "Oh Baby Baby", illustrates the puerile nature of Medusa, while her lover boy's song reflects the former's maternal aspect. "And she can hear Red crooning, crooning and yearning, Oh Baby Baby... singing for his supper, singing for his mother." (BB 143)

Feminine sexuality can not be discussed as consistent and homogeneous. There is no one consciousness identical to another as women's imagination is immeasurable. Med is presented as a woman of her own whims. She discards the norm of sisterhood and demands a man to entertain herself with. When Verity fails to adore her, she says, "Women are no use! Men. Now men might be different. At least before they do her in- again and again and again- men can be a load of fun. And they're beautiful! Her Boyo, her Yobo..." But in *Babel*, there are no real men. She describes her man as "a prince reduced by Circe to the status of a Piglet". (BB 146-47) Thus, The Black Piglet presents herself to her in the form of The Black Prince. Medusa expects him 'to love, to chase and over power' her which is not liked by him. Her domination of the Prince imposing sex and violence upon him is indicative of her inversion. "Medusa remembers her own battered and bloody head. Sex and passion. Sex and blood. That's how it has to be. There has to be adrenalin before anything can happen". She kicks The Black Prince. "Come on. Fight and get up. Come on fight and get up. Prove you're a man." (BB 148)

Medusa experiments with her body in order to understand her own erotogeneity. The writer presents her as unashamed of her sexuality irrespective of all the taboos and societal norms. Helene Cixous in "The Laugh of Medusa" discusses women's sexuality and ask them to expose themselves without any fear using literature as the medium. She says:

Write, let no one hold you back, let nothing stop you: not man; not the imbecilic capitalist machinery, in which publishing houses are the crafty, obsequious relayers of imperatives handed down by an economy that works against us and off our backs; and not yourself. Smug- faced readers, managing editors and big bosses don't like the true texts of women- female sexed texts. (Cixous)
Namjoshi wants to bring forth the idea of sexuality of women, ignored and demeaned in patriarchy. Medusa is the replica of a new woman of Cixous who has the caliber to come out of the closet and produce her sexuality on paper.

Building Babel deals with elevated and lofty ideas. Like Shakesperean sonnets, Namjoshi along with Time, takes up the notions related to Love, Death and Memory. Sister Sol compares the three, calls them the three sisters and weaves stories about their identities. During the course of her work, she sometimes uses offensive words for the goddess of the Babel, and corrects herself immediately so that she may not commit any blaspheme. She once called Kronos ‘Brainless’ and then corrected herself. Namjoshi talks about the challenges that the writers and poets encounter during the course of their career. Creating myths and stories sometimes lead to blaspheme which is against the religious and societal norms. She considers her own experiences and defends poets, particularly those belonging to her own community. In Introduction 1 of the text, she says:

By “inventing” gods and goddesses or making up stories about them, do I commit heresy? Do I blaspheme? I’m not entirely sure how a Hindu might blaspheme or what might constitute a Hindu heresy. You say, “Well, what about Hindu fundamentalism then?” To which I reply, “It doesn’t make sense. Hindu fundamentalism is a contradiction in terms.” (BB xi-xi)

She gives the vivid description of her Indian culture, and says that people of India are more concerned about fantasy, rather than rationality. Her Indianness influences her work and motivates her to create and recreate through fantasy. She remarks:

Every retelling of a myth is a re-working of it. Every hearing or reading of a myth is a recreation of it. It is only when we engage with a myth, that it resonates, that it becomes charged and re-charged with meaning. (BB xi, intro. 1)

Namjoshi continues with the theme of animal upliftment. She projects the fictional animals as dignified beings who unlike the real animals have self respect and resist humiliation. Her belief that every living and non-living object has a soul within it, helps her to weave stories about animals. The text provides answers to the questions raised by critics regarding her style. She writes:
“This ability to see that there is a qualitative difference between humans and animals, even in a story, may be the result of a Hindu background. A Hindu wouldn’t dream of “animating” animals, i.e. putting a soul into them. They have “soul” already. There’s a soul in everything. I’ve said in The Blue Donkey Fables that I write about animals, not people because I like them better; but to say, “I like them better” is perhaps only another way of saying that they fire my imagination.” (BB xv Intro. 1)

Alice’s Cat rejects her proposal of being her sister due to the prevailing differences and inequality within them. The Cat considers herself superior as she bears a resemblance to a tiger, which is stronger than Alice. Alice persuades the Cat, “If both of us were tigers?” The Cat merely smiled. Alice realized that the Cat was practicing; she was sitting in the sun acquiring stripes. “I am more like a tiger than you are.” (BB 18) Alice’s stooping to the floor to pamper the Cat indicates Namjoshi’s attempt to bring equality between animals and human beings. The Black Piglet who is an unprivileged and a non-literary animal is projected as the most intelligent of all, “Who is The Black Piglet? A succulent porker. A voyager, a wanderer, a thinker. The Black Piglet liked to tell stories. That was her thing.” (BB 3).

The writer raises the question of race and associates her with the brown-skinned women writers who lag behind due to the lack of opportunities in the white dominated culture. In Appendix A, “Solly’s Explanation” Solly blames other sisters, who are human beings, for undervaluing The Black Piglet and taking her life. “She was neither a pig nor a princess. She was an ordinary woman of unusual intelligence: brown skin, brown eyes, dark hair. [Both “unusual” and “ordinary”? Perhaps it’s you who undervalue the worth of your friend?] (BB 88)

After ‘Time’, ‘Memory’ also plays a significant role for a writer and a diasporic writer in particular. As a foreigner and an alien in a country unfamiliar and unknown, nostalgia and the reminiscent of the past are the chief sources to link to the native land. In Babel, Memory provides an ‘instantly available frame of references’ in the reader’s mind to make ‘the resonances of the poem instantly available’, (BB xviii) while ‘Death’, another major aspect of poetry also resonates in most of Namjoshi’s work. The writer faced Death during her early childhood when she lost her father in an air crash. As a token of condolence, she writes elegies and discusses his demise in many of her texts. Poets and writers have always talked about the inevitability of
death but they have projected it as noble and eternal. Namjoshi’s projection of The Black Piglet with Death as her shadow following her forever symbolizes the insignificance of the Piglet and the definite nature of Death. The Piglet dies, but her chronicles of Kronos remain to serve the Babel. It also illustrates the triviality of the life of subalterns and the marginalized, specifically of unprivileged animals. Piglets have the fear of getting slaughtered as they could become the victim of butcher’s knife anytime. The writer projects her fear and suffering in the words of Sis Sol:

Sometimes in the desert, when we were working together, Piglet would look over her shoulder. What do you see? I asked her once. “A shadow of a shadow. A figment.” ...The Piglet could hear Death’s footsteps. And so? Was the quest for Crone Kronos merely an escape? Were the tales of Crone Kronos merely a noise, something to cover up the sufferings of Death? No, that is less than a fair judgement. She met her Death”. (BB 89- 90)

The writer guides the readers to produce their own works of art through revisioning and rewriting. She addresses readers and readership and says that good listeners or readers ‘in the act of re-creation’ are good writers as well. According to her, a good reader has a huge stock of references that leads to better understanding and imagination. She also acts as a teacher who finds World Wide Web to be very helpful in a literature classroom as it is interesting and links one work of art to the other in a fraction of a second without consuming time and compels the readers to produce new thoughts and ideas. The last chapter of the novel is the invitation to readers to contribute their conjecture about feasible cultural traditions that the sisters could formulate. She calls it a game for which she likes to set rules. She says, “I don’t want to go about all the things I don’t understand. I do want to set out the rules of the game. “Come and play” is an invitation. Building Babel is what people do.” (intro. 1, BB xvi) She recommends Web as a medium to produce innovative piece of art on the patterns of the read text or poem. In The Fabulous Feminist, she remarks:

Cyber Space is the perfect analogue to ordinary cultural space that made me put the last chapter on the internet and invite others to contribute to it.

It is the connection between people’s brains that constitutes cultural space. A cultural artifact cannot exist in vacuum. It needs to be looked at, read, heard. And what is important about cyberspace is not that it
links computers, but that it links people’s brains. A poem or a story
comes out of ‘the rag and bone shop of the heart and other people’s
poems and stories—‘monument of unageing intellect’.” (168)

Medusa produces a new garden where everyone is free to produce his/ her
own thoughts with freedom. This Garden is associated to Cyber Space which in the
introduction is considered the medium of accession and exploration:

…the garden is a place of idyllic splendour. Everyone exists, everyone
persists. Everyone and everything get on with each other. What do they
do in the garden?... They think thoughts. They mediate. They leviate...
It is the Garden of the Intellect... They tend and nurture and take
extremely good care of the plants and animals and of themselves. In
this garden no murder is necessary... It is a moral Garden... Everyone
has the same power... everyone has loud voice and in everyone’s
fingertips there’s the power to stun. And so? And so there are very few
arguments because they’d deafen everyone. (BB 158)

The writer compares Cyber Space with a garden in which readers and writers
feel delighted and enjoy their own power and freedom. The power is on their finger
tips that works only in a single tap or a single click and provides everyone the
opportunity to get connected to any piece of work available.

She fantasizes about the reader and the writer talking to each other in a
dialogic form. The reader puts the charge on the writer for imposing his/her ideologies
upon the former, while the writer discards his blames and confers the account of
reader and readership. Namjoshi puts forward the notion of reader response theory in
which the reader decides the meaning of the text. She presents the reader as being
aware of his/her brain colonization who thus, demands the piece of art to be
interactive rather than writer centered. She tries to eliminate the imbalance of power
between the reader and the writer. She uses the theory of Genetics in which she
compares ‘genes’ with Richard Dawkins word ‘memes’ for the cultural building
blocks and says:

Multicultural memes. Like genes they mix. Like genes they need a
host. A host to lodge in and to procreate... So genes and memes have a
common interest. Genocide kills the carriers of genes and culture.
Extinct species and dead languages... Probably much better for a gene.
or a meme to find a live host. Not in books or in computers, but in brains. (BB 185)

The hosts are the readers who mutate a piece of art in order to produce a new breed. At present readers do not want to be passive beings, rather they want equal participation. The writer suggests that the act of reading is itself the act of writing. In ‘The Reader’s Text’, she asks readers to produce and write. She informs them, “Dear Reader, Sweet Barbarian, don’t you understand that you are complicit? In the act of reading you inevitably build.” (BB 190)

Building Babel attempts to compel women to create their own culture of writing and literature. Namjoshi deals with the aspect of poetry, its definition and the factors responsible in deciding one’s artifact. She also deals with the writer, art of writing, reader and readership and emphasizes the use of Web to make reading and writing interesting and convenient. Her technique of selecting the characters of old fairy tales and mythical archetypes provides her opportunity to revise, rewrite, construct and deconstruct the fixed notions and stereotypes of androcentric society.

Goja: An Autobiographical Myth

An autobiography is a written account of the life of a person written by that person, whereas a myth is fictitious. Oxford English Dictionary defines myth as “a purely fictitious narrative usually involving supernatural persons, actions or events, and embodying some popular idea concerning natural or historical phenomena”. Namjoshi’s Goja, as the subtitle indicates is both an autobiography and a myth as it is the truthful account of the writer’s own experiences. She fantasizes and fabulates in order to integrate Love and Charity in fables, fairy tales and poetry. In the Preface to the novel, Namjoshi points out:

This account is autobiographical in that my experience is all I have. It’s fictional since any version manipulates facts. And it’s mythical, because it’s by making patterns that I make sense of all I have.

But the “facts” in this narrative are not reliable; I have chosen some, left out others. When I ask: “What really mattered?” the answer is Love or Charity. (preface ix)

The author does not ask the reader to expect the text to fulfill the autobiographical pact as the events are exaggerated and altered for artistic and
thematic purposes. *Goja* is a novel in which segments are fictionalized in order to fill the space left by the failure of memory. It is not only the autobiography of the writer but also the biography of the two elderly women—her grandmother, Goldie, the Ranisaheb, and her female servant, Goja who is very special to the writer.

The book is divided into three sections that deal with Namjoshi’s experiences in India, Canada and later in England. The writer continues with the aspect of power hierarchy, power imbalance, identity crisis and sexual orientation in an androcentric society. The novel is narrated from the perspective of an elite five year old Indian child, i.e. Namjoshi herself. The narrator projects the social, cultural and political scenario of pre-independence and post-colonial India. Like in earlier works she takes into account binaries such as rich and poor, man and woman, black and white, master and servant, and so on. The very first chapter ‘Goja’, is a tribute to her female servant Goja, who looked after her as a child. Goja loves her and takes care of her along with her grandmother. Putting Goja as an emblem for the entire poor class and her grandmother for rich, Namjoshi presents the disparities between the two classes in India. The book is a satire on dominant culture. It expresses empathy for the subalterns, viz. poor, people of colour, lesbians, women, and children.

The writer gives vivid descriptions of Goja’s neglected and demeaned life in the aristocratic household. Born in a poor family, Goja is sent to the house of royals as a five year old child, as in those days working in the house of the rulers was a privilege. The writer discusses the oppression of children who instead of obtaining their rights and education are made to work and serve the rich:

> When you’re a servant and only five years old, you sleep on the floor in the dark, and if the ladies of the house are kind to you, they let you sleep near their beds. Its to keep them company, to tell them a story, to fetch a glass of water should thirst arise.” (*Goja* 4)

She compares and contrasts the lives of two women in order to highlight the vast discrepancy between the two. As a child, the writer questions the unequal behavior of her family towards them when both of them are loved by her equally. She is shocked by the ranking order of those who have brought her up:

If I loved them both, then why was one allowed to be a queen, and why did the other one have to be a servant. If they were the two people in the whole world who gave me love when I was little, then why weren’t
they both allowed to be my mother? I called my grandmother “mother”, but I called Goja “Goja”. (Goja 5)

Her elders asked her to address her grandmother in plural in order to honour her, while Goja was addressed in singular without any respect. Goja’s life as an archetype of the poor class is meaningless as there are no records of her date of birth and death, and no one bothered to keep her photograph. Namjoshi is embarrassed by her family’s attitude towards the down trodden. She carries a burden of guilt for being incapable of erasing these differences. She not only creates myths but also deconstructs them. She wants to eradicate all the biases associated with both the rich and the poor. In an interview with Christine Croyden, she says,

The glory we attach to power, to the conqueror and the disgrace we attach to those who are oppressed. We are all guilty of it when we have a sneaking admiration for Bill Gates, not because he’s clever but because he’s so stinking rich. (Croyden)

Using her ironic tone, the writer demythicizes both the classes. For rich, servants have weird ways of living. Using their words, the writer in an ironical manner remarks, “Servants by definition are not supposed to be beautiful. It’s not their prerogative” (Goja 9). She clarifies in her next statement, “The queen smells of jasmine, Goja, her servant, smells of common mud. But Mud is a perfume over which the poets have ecstasised”. (Goja 8) She takes her grandmother as an ideal for the wealthy and says that it is biased to call the rich ‘suffering resistant’ as they too weep, have joint pains, and taste failure. (Goja 141) She creates myths about dominant cultures and demythicizes the marginalized. The ‘monkey’ imagery is historically associated with the Blacks. Namjoshi transfers this image to the Whites and calls them “grey-eyed, pink-faced monkeys”. (Goja 6) We are also told stories about her family’s experiences of the West. Her mother opens the freezer compartment of the refrigerator to explain to one of her siblings how she lived in a frozen dwelling in Canada. She narrates how the Canadians exclaim, “Look, look, see, see Indian princess spitting rubies!”, (Goja 91) when her mother chewed paan in the intense Canadian winter.

With the help of such myths, Namjoshi avenges the West for humiliating people of colour. She proves to ‘the distant West’ that ‘they too can be mythologised’. (Goja 92) Her early experiences of America left her contemptuous and scornful. Not only she who is discriminated against on the basis of race and ethnocentricity, but also
her motherland is disgraced by them. One of her fellow students' father finds her teeth white in contrast to her dark skin. He mocks the writer saying, "Do you have tigers and lions in India?", and goes on to say, "No, no,"... "you don't have lions in India. It's in Africa they have lions and tigers." (Goja 72-73) The writer carries the personal and political simultaneously. She relates her own experiences to universal marginalization. In the East she is at the centre, but the West keeps her on the margins.

The beginning of the novel reads like a 'dramatic monologue', in which the writer raises questions, provides answers and settles arguments by herself. The stream of consciousness technique helps her to proceed: We encounter her psychological state and thought process. Her thoughts swing up and down between present and past, reality and fantasy. Her interrogative attitude exposes the inner conflicts of a woman, a lesbian and a feminist, in a patriarchal domain. Harveen S. Mann claims that she exhibits "a certain unease with her upper middle class, Hindu, and normatively heterosexual milieu." (Mann 4) Namjoshi's commentary ranges from Goja, to servants, poverty, charity, marginalization of children, to the binaries of the East and the West.

However, Namjoshi is a first person omniscient narrator, she provides a voice to the voiceless i.e. to her beloved living dead. Goldie and Goja speak, listen, complain and argue, providing the novel with a dialogic form. C. Vijayasree calls the writer, "an artful transgressor", as she transgresses all the boundaries of literary genres. She weaves the text with fairy tales, fables, poems and prose, sometimes ridiculous and sometimes meaningful. Her 'Fairy Tale' and 'The Needy' (Goja 22-37) are absurd but also are loaded with meanings. The Piglet assumes herself to be the Queen of Spades, dances, combats, looks herself into the mirror, compares herself with the Queen, and all the differences between them are erased highlighting the fluidity of identity and meaninglessness of power hierarchy. The novel resonates with allusion and references of canonical writers such as Shakespeare, Auden, Blake, Biblical references to Adam and Eve, Charity, Hell and Paradise.

Namjoshi is contemptuous of power hierarchy and imbalance. Having been brought up in an aristocratic family which employed a large number of servants, she understood class distinction at a very early age. Her description of Goja's life highlights the condition of and the treatment given to those positioned on the lowest rung. She wants to remove all the gaps between her grandmother and Goja and also
desires to make them equal. Her deep bonding with the latter is one medium that eliminates the disparity. During her childhood both Goja and she slept in the same room. Goja slept on the floor and the writer on the bed. Goja also feeds her dried fish and tells her the Monkey-Crocodile story which she incorporates in her work. Namjoshi contrasts Goja’s life with Goldie’s. Goldie’s life is pompous and grand, while Goja has a miserable life. She cleans, washes, cooks and takes care of children. The writer takes the ‘babul tree’ as an emblem for Goja. The babul thrives in harsh climatic conditions. The novel appears to be an elegy in which the writer mourns and praises two beloved dead people. Namjosh in an interview with Christine Croyden says, “An elegy is also praise. My experience of Goja, my experience of Goldie, they are like people who inhabit my head. They are whom I am- in part, at least who I am.” (Croyden)

Like Shakespearian Sonnets, she places stress on the inevitable nature of death and calls it a great leveler for after the cremation every minute particle of the body mixes with dust and ashes. She says:

There may be a distance, yells the child, but this is
a harsh landscape, where the only tree that dares
to grow regardless of water, I mean the lack of it,
is the fierce babul. Oh here in this arid and sunburnt
landscape, my bones are your bones, and
in the chemical analysis of your ashes and my dust

there is no difference! (Goja 10)

Patriarchy treats all women equally, as they suffer at different levels in the male dominated society. The writer brings forth the idea that no woman is left marginalized from the clutches of androcentric world. In Goja, she points out, “...to all the queens and princesses that ever there were that no woman is a first-class human being. She’s second class...” (110) Both Goja and Goldie, however possess different levels of pains but their treatment by the patriarchy makes them stand in one row, thereby eradicating all the distances. “But Goja? Are you in fact my grandmother’s sister? Unequal in rank, but equal at bottom, because men rule...”, says the writer. (Goja 17) She recapitulates the idea of multiplicity and fluidity of identities according to which one acquires the role of the other as per need.

Money is another factor that decides power and rank and plays a dominant role in rating human beings. Goja is powerless due to lack of money. Namjoshi says,
So then what’s the difference between the queen
and her servant? Oh it’s a qualitative difference,
and quantities of money make a different world.” (Goja 17)

Money is valuable. The wastage of coins by the writer as a child amazed the servants.

Nostalgia and reminiscences are the key features of diasporic writers. Goja revolves round the past and present, the childhood memories of the writer, her family, their happiness and sorrows, and her journey from one nation to another in search for solace and satisfaction. We see the writer growing up as a student, an IAS officer, a teacher, a lover and later as a prolific writer.

As a writer of Children’s Literature, Namjoshi knows the art of projecting children’s psychology. She takes her childhood as a prototype and discusses the sensitivities of children. She highlights that they yearn for love and need to be catered to and care for. Despite being loved by her family, Namjoshi always felt isolated and ignored as a child. She brings her caregivers to life. She hallucinates and converses with them. She complains to Goja and Goldie for not protecting her from sexual abuse by a male servant. She also charges them for sending her to an American boarding school situated in the Himalayan foothills against her will, and later to J. Krishna Murthi School in South India. Sue Gerhardt- a child psychologist in an interview with Book Brigade talks about her book, Why Love Matters, and says:

> If you have faced early separation from loved ones, or have been ignored by a depressed mother, for example, your brain may be hyper-reactive to stress, which can predispose to depression in adulthood. Very unpredictable or frightening parenting early in life has been linked with adult personality disorders. (Brigade)

Even after growing into an old woman, Namjoshi behaves like a child in the presence of the two women. During her interaction, she exhibits the mood swings typical of childhood. But she does not want them to treat her as a child. “I realize that they don’t want me to be hurt. I also realize that for them I’ll always be five years old. I burst out at them, “I’m nearly the same age as you now! How can I always be the child, the Little One?” (Goja 125) She could not get the love of her parents, as her mother was the king’s progeny, and father was a test pilot who was always away, leaving young Suniti and other siblings behind with Goja and Goldie. Thus the women became important emblems of the writer’s childhood. All her life she associated them with
culture and values of the East. Her American boarding school always seemed an exile. In a letter to her mother she wrote:

“They have pink faces and their hair is made of metal”, I say to my mother, “Please take me home. I cannot stay here, I cannot understand a word they are saying.” (Goja 39)

In the American school she had her first contact come with the White race. She felt lonely and isolated. The school seemed a hell, where she suffered endlessly. She was interested in books and sports, and ignored boys. The other girls ‘wear matching clothes, compete for boys and gain status.’ (Goja 43) Namjoshi was expected to adjust to the milieu of the school and with the ideology of being ‘heterosexual, Christian and American.’ She had none to play with and she passed her time talking to ants. She recalls those days in the following manner:

They were civilized little girls. Who had taught them the tactics of gangs? Be! Be what? Be heterosexual! Be Christian! Be American! Be! Be like them? No, not that. Wanting would have been enough. Wanting would have been better. You must want to be like us. That would be satisfactory. But to fail to want to be like them? That constitutes contempt, and the jury pounces- like a pack of cards. But it hurt. If hell had existed, they would have enjoyed being there, devising tortures and cunning snares. (Goja 42)

Namjoshi protests against marginalization of children. She describes the adults as ‘gods’, who put her in hell and never looked back and cared. She satirizes the men, the wealthy class and the White race as they dominate and oppress the subalterns. Being worried about children especially of poor class, she says:

It would be better if young of the species did not require quite so much attention. What do the young of the other species do? I meant of the servants? Who looks after them? (Goja 12)

Soon after leaving the American school, she is admitted to J. Krishnamurthi School in South India. The new school appears friendly and familiar as everything there was Indian. This school, too, taught the English language. She attained English education and later proceeded to the West for higher education. The years at school made her lose trust in the adults:

Eventually, between leaving school and entering university, I stopped looking to the adults to be gods, and I stopped expecting them to make
things better. But the need to idealise remained, and acknowledging that these adults were only human beings took much longer. (Goja 51)

English language, along with Christian ideology colonized her mind. At the American School, her mother instructed her to listen to whatever they imparted, but not become Christianized. But it is difficult for one to dye a cloth without making her hands coloured. Bell Hooks in her essay, “Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics” says that if one’s mind is fully colonized then “one’s creativity, imaginations” and “freedom” are at risk. But the one “that resists colonization, struggles for freedom of expression” which “begins within one’s segregated, colonized community and family.” (Hooks 240) The writer struggles to resist colonization but still imbibes some of the Western ideologies. It is through this religion that she learns about Charity. We often find the writer seeking for Charity in many of her works among which, Saint Suniti and the Dragon is the perfect example. In her work, she thus draws on Christian ethos along with Greek and Hindu mythology. Heterogeneous mixture of various cultures makes the writer’s ideology a treasure where one can find jewels of both East and the West. In Goja, she confesses, “My mind is a hodgepodge of Greek myth, Hindu experience and Christian words.” (Goja 58) She searches for Charity in the East as well as in the West and finds that Charity favours the marginalized.

Goja also gives social, political and cultural account of both pre- independent and post- colonial India. It presents glimpses of British Raj, feudal system, kings and nobles, decline of princely states, Congress party, inflation etc. Namjoshi is obsessed with the poor condition of her country and poverty in particular. She is horrified by the incidents that she witnesses, such as the poor scavenging on garbage heaps, a beggar woman eating up the vomit due to hunger, and so on. Her desire to serve the underprivileged and to create her own identity encouraged her to join the Civil Services. The IAS rank provides her with power and authority, but not freedom to make her own sexual choice.

In India, the writer was treated as a rebel who did not conform to the norms of society. Her lesbianism created homophobia as she feared that the revelation of her identity would disgrace her and her family. She constantly experienced fear of social ostracism and guilt and did not reveal her sexual preference to her family. Hence, years later, after becoming an established writer she uses Goja, as a medium to free herself of all the charges which have been labeled upon her. She says:
Well, that was horrid. Everyone said so- it was a horrid and unmentionable thing. Perhaps that was why during their lifetimes I never had the nerve to say anything to them. But now? Goja? Goldie? I would like if possible to make my peace. (Goja 76)

Through Goja, Namjoshi not only tries to unburden herself but also levels charges upon her elders for not bestowing enough understanding and care during her childhood.

She gives an account of why she left India and migrated to the West. Her position as an IAS officer made her encounter the worse possible conditions. She finds the common people pleading, suffering, hopeless, and desperate. This makes her ashamed of herself for having been born to a better life. Unable to cope with their plight, she decides to quit her job and move to the US:

It was the discrepancy between the poor and the rich that felt so wrong, not just the poverty. The gap was so vast that it seemed to imply there was no kinship between them, that they were two different species. And underneath all this was the appalling knowledge that we were not two different species: what was being done, we were doing to ourselves. (Goja 61)

Namjoshi, at this juncture, fell in love with one of her friends whom she addressed as Sahali who went abroad. Namjoshi followed her like a true lover, for in a country like India it was difficult for two lesbians to spend life together. Thus, the honour of the family made her take the initiative. She points out, “To be a lesbian in India in those days- it’s probably so even now- was so appalling, so terrible, that it was like putting one’s head on the block” (Goja 55). Love, however, brought some stability and satisfaction to her life. She writes:

A love affair is an oasis. It punctuates ordinary life with glimpses of paradise. And that is why people sometimes honour their old loves: they remember that at one time in their arms there was ecstasy. But the blazing, roaring earthly paradise of young lovers is not the home of Charity, though she can visit there. But then she can visit anywhere because she is kind. (Goja 59)

During her conversation with Goldie and Goja, the writer confesses about her love affairs and discloses her sexual identity. At college, at the age of sixteen, she fell in love for the first time. Falling in love is a pleasurable experience for her. She
describes the lesbian relationship as a Paradise, where two partners truly romanticize for they are at higher risk of social ridicule. Lesbianism is taboo. Defying institutionalized heterosexuality, she builds her own paradise in which man is the ‘snake’, and adults represent heteronormativity and punishment. Her initial failure in love made her forego this paradise when her partner married someone else. She refers to Sahali, whom she pursued to America only to discover her heterosexuality. Paramour, has two children like Saraswati of Mayaditi and wants Namjoshi to look after her:

Paramour wanted me to be aware of her everyday life: the tuna sandwiches, the baby-sitting, the papers to be marked, the snow suits into which her children had to be zipped. (Goja 102)

The writer describes the complexity of her own sexual identity. Sexual choices can not be chained. She does not want compulsory motherhood and decides to leave. Next she associates with Christine Donald- a feminist, a friend and a partner. Ultimately she settles down with Gillian Hanscombe, an Australian who lives in England. It is with this woman that Namjoshi has come to terms and understood the meaning of love and enduring relationship. She says, “We knew we’d have to find something tougher and more lasting than just romantic love” (Goja 124). We see the development of Namjoshi as a writer and a poet. “She uses autobiography to explore her own split subjectivities- as diasporic, Indian, as woman, as lesbian, and as Anglophone Postcolonial. The act of writing and language are, for her, central elements in understanding the terrifying charms between each of these.” (Nair 82)

As a poet, she tries to romanticize every aspect of her life through nature imagery. Like the Romantics, she uses landscapes to depict her emotions. In the tradition of Wordsworth, she projects the guiding spirit of Nature. There are many instances in the novel that present landscapes symbolizing her state of mind. Her discomfort and trauma in American boarding school in the Himalayan foothills is portrayed as:

Shale, soil, and roads carved out of the steep hillside and the moss, always the moss, the dark, soft, emerald moss, which was no comfort, and the ferns, maidenhair ferns, bearded Christmas ferns, whose names we were supposed to memorise: that was how it was. Sometimes the path was only one foot wide, and the valley was hundreds, no, thousands of feet, below. Dangerous! The rhododendron trees-
not shrubs, with brittle branches- had red flowers. There were pines, firs, cedars, oaks- dentiferous oaks (also memorized). The smell of pine meant nine months of exile... (Goja 44)

Her peace of mind at J. Krishnamurthi School is communicated through the ample shade of tamarinds, banyans, neem and peepal trees. (Goja 50- 51) And the landscape appears tougher, harsher and intenser for her when it was not, when she heard about the marriage of her first partner.

I knew that the landscape could absorb grief, though there was a dark space, which even the landscape could not occupy. Perhaps that dark space was the awareness of betrayal, or of mortality perhaps. End of Paradise. (Goja 56- 57)

As a woman of colour, a Hindu and a lesbian immigrant in the West, Namjoshi is marginalized. Her early experiences in America depict her alienation and her encounter with other discriminations, such as racism, sexism and homophobia. Humiliation and suffering could not allow the writer to confess the truth about her experiences in the West. Her embarrassment made her hide her experiences from her family as she feared that revelation would bring disgrace to them and she would be called back. But through the medium of Goja, she attempts to acknowledge all guilt and follies, and says the unsaid. In the West she is ignored, patronized and made fun of. She imagines herself to be Alice who has entered a strange world where she is an alien who is given no importance. But this alienation is advantageous for celebrating the freedom of being a poet and a lesbian:

“In the West, as a person of no importance, I was unlikely to cause a scandal. And there was no family there whose glory I could tarnish. What I did or who I was didn’t matter because I didn’t matter. I was a student again, and had no family and no background. I was nobody. That was freedom of a sort”... “It may be that behind the labels- poet, lesbian, artist, bohemian, poor person, student- I was guilty of a more fundamental crime. I was unwilling to serve the family and to conform to society.” (Goja 75- 76)

After her completion of Ph.D. on the Cantos of Ezra Pound, she spent seventeen years teaching Literature in Toronto. She gained some respect and power but surprisingly remained alien to the language. In India, she was fluent in English but
the US seemed like a forest of words. She faced problems in understanding the context of words:

I knew about them. I knew their language, and then I discovered I didn’t! I understand the words, but not the context... (Goja 80) She further adds, It took me several years and required my politicization to understand how language had power over power itself. Over the years language mediated everything: my struggle with powerlessness and loss of identity, my understanding of who defined whom and my need to work out what really mattered and somehow to say it. (Goja 78-79)

Namjoshi finds the East worse in poverty and power imbalance. She takes the aspect of human rights and opines that human beings should not be deprived of their rights and self respect, be it a woman, lesbian, gay, poor or a servant. She is infuriated with everyone around. When asked by her grandmother whom she shouts at, she replies, “At myself? At the pain? At the whole of India?” (Goja 127) She wants to change the entire scenario of the world. Her wish is fulfilled after she imagines Goja taking the initiative and asking Goldie to be quiet. The writer rejoices at the act of Goja and says, “Wow! It’s a revolutionary act. A bit of me is gleeful”. (Goja 131) But her joy is useless as it is very late and matters no longer. Namjoshi desires to uplift the marginalized. Even inanimate objects are not left unnoticed. The English idea of providing names to small rivers makes her happy, as it signifies that even the minute objects are given importance and recognition.

Having been brought up among the rich and poor, masters and servants, East and the West, and as the victim of social contempt for not being straight, the writer is traumatized and tries to remove the gap after bridging the vast polarities, weaving myths and fantasy along with facts. She moves away from the social considerations of the novel to explore her internal, mental and emotional life, and applies her experiences as a prototype to discover the present scenario of the world after bringing her beloved dead to life in order to say the unsaid, and fulfill the unfulfilled.

The writer tries to rearrange and replace the patriarchal set-up with the rewriting of myths, old fables and fairy tales. She uses fairy tales as the medium to shape the adult roles after questioning gender and sexual politics. She opposes the forceful adoption of heterosexuality and stresses upon the personal selection of one’s sexuality. Her use of fantasy fills the gap between the huge divisions such as the East and the West, rich and the poor, lesbian and straight etc.
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Chapter Four
“Try and Try Till You Succeed”
A Study of ‘Aditi Stories’- *Aditi Adventures*
*I, II and III*
Aditi Adventures I- Unlikely Friends

Apart from being a poet, a fabulist and a novelist, Suniti Namjoshi has experimented with Children’s Literature as well. As a feminist, she is dissatisfied with the dominant male discourse of traditional fairy tales, the sexist social values and institutions it supports. Old fairy tales are based upon the fixed stereotypical notions of sex, gender roles and socialization thus, like other feminist writers of modern fairy tales such as Angela Carter, Margaret Atwood, Anne Sexton, Joanna Russ, Olga Broumas, she too applies feminist perspectives to develop a new vision of the world in the form of modern fairy tales. She has not only re-written the old fairy tales but has also invented her own to serve the cause of feminism. Anne Susan Koshy in her work, The Short Fiction of Angela Carter, Margaret Atwood and Suniti Namjoshi: A Study in Feminism and Fairy Tales, remarks:

The treatment of fairy tales in literature has significant implications for feminist theory and literary criticism as they provide the expressions of that which is lacking in actual life and highlight the possibilities of alternatives... It is true that they do entertain children and adults, but they also seriously tell us about the world we live in. (Koshy 74)

Fairy tales mostly appeal to children, but they spellbind adults as well. It is this mesmerizing effect that captures the minds of both and colonizes them. Writers of feminist fairy tales view the classical fairy tales as political as they are based on the structure of male domination and female subordination, and thus, invent their own versions to deconstruct them. Namjoshi’s Aditi stories are original tales written for children. She dedicates these tales to her niece, Aditi and makes her the protagonist. R. Uma Maheshwari in Hindustan Times a daily newspaper has reported:

Namjoshi admittedly created Aditi for her own niece Aditi, who lives in Devon, UK. Apparently, children in a school in London were so impressed by the first Aditi book that they wished that Aditi- the book character - visits London during her adventures. (Maheshwari)

These stories are twelve in number and are compiled in a series of three with four books in one pack, entitled as Aditi Adventures I, II, III. In her first set of the series, we are introduced to four friends- Aditi, the one-eyed monkey or Monkeyji, the ant or Siril and the elephant or the Beautiful Ele, who make friends with the two dragons- Goldie and Opal, along with the three sages. They undergo quests and voyages in
order to help the sages, and are in turn helped by them when they encounter hardships. The tales appear to be the answers to the biased patriarchal notions contained in the earlier ones. Like the other feminist writers, Namjoshi, too, liberates society from psychological, cultural, social and educational prejudices generated by them. Jack Zipes in *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion* says:

... out of necessity that we write our own texts to gain a sense not simply of what has happened in reality but also of what has happened on psychological, economic, cultural, and other levels to free ourselves of the dictates of other socio-historical texts that have prescribed and ordered our thinking and need to be disordered if we are to perceive for ourselves the processes that produce social structures, modes of production, and cultural artifacts. (2)

Fairy tales are considered to be the significant cultural and social influences in most children’s lives. They are the engrossing stories for children that help them either to overcome their angst or make them to identify with the characters and conquer their existential dilemma. In short, it could be said that fairy tales directly affect the children’s psyche. They affect the perspective of reality in permanent manner and liberate the child’s imagination. Bettelheim in his essay “Bringing Order out of Chaos” writes:

Through simple and direct images the fairy story helps the child sort out of his complex and ambivalent feelings, so that these begin to fall each one into a separate place, rather than being in all one big muddle. As he listens to the fairy tale the child gets ideas about how he may create order out of chaos, which is his inner life. (74-75)

Classical fairy tales help children to acknowledge arbitrary gender roles which train young girls to become inactive, self-sacrificing and obedient, and boys to be dominant, competitive, rational and powerful. The evil step-mother and ugly step-sisters, beautiful but passive virgin, authoritative and chivalric prince, ferocious wolf and vicious monsters and dragons make their minds set for identity fixation. As far as the feminist fairy tales are concerned, they are the inversion of the old tales and are based upon the idea of identity fluidity and rationality. *Aditi Adventures I*, too, imparts the same notion and deconstructs the myths associated to cultural identity. The adventure begins with *Aditi and the One-eyed Monkey* (AOM) in which Aditi meets the other three creatures- the one-eyed monkey, the ant and the elephant, and
befriends them. The three creatures help her in finding and taming a dragon which sucks up the moisture from the kingdom of Aditi’s grand parents soon after the rains. Aditi and her friends are provided with the cloak of invisibility, sword of courage and the ball of magic clay to overcome the problems. Meanwhile, they meet the Island Sage and develop acquaintance with her, and with her guidance reach the dragon, tame it and befriend it.

The second adventure, entitled Aditi and the Thames Dragon (ATD) is another enchanting tale in which the four friends are called to help the twins- Roshan and Rohit of England. They have to save their city from drowning by the fury of a river dragon. They discover, after investigation, that it is not the rage but the agony of the dragon at the root of the problem. River Thames has been polluted and poisoned and the dragon is restless and the Thames is at the risk of a flood. The children, along with the four friends and a friendly dragon from the first chronicle save the river and the river dragon. They are assisted by the mass media.

The third book of the series entitled Aditi and the Marine Sage (AMS) is a fairy tale in the contemporary mode. This adventure is on dragon back into the depths of Australian oceans on the Great Barrier Reef. The Elephant looks for her lost identity inscribed on a stone in her childhood, and the One- Eyed monkey needs therapy for her arthritic foot. The high-tech dragon spews laser beams.

The fourth and the last tale is Aditi and the Techno Sage (ATS). In this tale, the mission of the four adventurers along with the two dragons and a lion cub is to convey the Island Sage’s message to her third sister, the Techno Sage, who lives on an island of Stony Lake in Canada. The shield created by the Techno Sage around her island in order to guard her from the disturbances of the outside world, is the cause of trouble that prevents them from reaching the island. During their expedition, they come across laughing loons, sulky sunfish and deadly deadheads that make the journey troublesome. The Techno-Sage is a scientist who has invented the time-stretching jewels. The extensive use of the jewels leads the sage to fall into problems which later are solved by the four friends.

However, all the four tales of the first series possess mesmerizing effect of classical tales, such as- journeys into bizarre worlds, flights on dragons, thinking and talking strange creatures, unusual places, like- the depths of oceans, Stony Lake island of Canada etc. They also possess the features of Utopian/ Dystopian tales combined with the attributes of a science fiction. Modern technology gadgets, tele-
communication, mass media, Thought Submarine, Time-Stretching Jewel and Stony Lake Silk etc. situated in London unite in the creation of a contemporary fairy tale.

Traditional tales are based upon the structure of separation of the two spheres i.e. male and female world. What is praise-worthy in males, however, is rejected in females. Power, strength, chivalry, heroism are all associated with men, whereas docility, meekness, passivity and beauty are the attributes of women. In the male-dominated discourse, being powerful is associated with being unwomanly. Thus, they serve as training manuals for girls related with virtues and goodness, and make them aware of fixed gender roles. Andrea Dworkin in *Woman Hating*, points out:

... We have not formed that ancient world- it has formed us. We ingested it as children whole, had its values and consciousness imprinted on our minds as cultural absolutes long before we were in fact men and women. We have taken the fairy tales of childhood with us into maturity, chewed but still lying in the stomach, as real identity.

(32-33)

The modern feminist tale, *Aditi Adventures I* is inversed as the writer discards the established notions of identity and builds an androgynous culture in order to bring about a revolution that will eliminate the differences created by stereotypical gender roles. The tales describe women involved in activities that are not traditionally feminine to speed the termination of rigid fashions of socialization. Women are no longer victims or commodities but are heroines, and also the subjects. The writer wants to achieve a new social order founded on humanistic values. In all the four books of this series, we see the two genders co-existing and cooperating. Aditi, the Beautiful Ele, Monkeyji, Opal and the three sages are female, while Siril and Goldie are male. Their contribution and collaboration in each journey is equal and the readers are not concerned about their genders. Aditi is rational and intellectual, Monkeyji is wise, Siril is perfect in locating maps, while Beautiful Ele and Goldie are helpful in carrying and ferrying.

Nanjoshi disrupts the myths associated with societal norms and gender construction and aims at humanizing and equilibrating cultural value system, which has historically served predominantly male interests. She retrieves marginalized groups, such as women and animals by presenting them as heroic and central. In *Aditi and the One-eyed Monkey*, Goldie is challenged by Aditi when the former refuses to listen to their plea and flings the monkey in the air, “Suddenly the dragon lashed out
at Aditi but Aditi was too quick for it and slashed its paw.” (68) Unlike the stereotypical women characters, Aditi refused to serve the dragon as its slave, “What I want you to do,” it said to Aditi, “is to cook and clean and look after the cave. You can be my servant.” “No”, said Aditi. “That’s not why we are here. You must listen.” (AOM 64) Her animal-friends also prove to be wise and brave on different occasions.

Namjoshi also redeems the dignity of minute beings like ants, and underprivileged animals such as monkeys. They fight courageously with the three lionesses and their six cubs on their first visit to the Island Sage. Siril is quick, decisive and wise as he creates apparitions out of magic clay to stabilize situations. He creates a dragon to frighten the monkey folk at the time of their quarrel with Monkeys, “Suddenly there was a thunderous roar. A huge dragon was breathing down on all of them. Its head was higher than the highest treetops. The monkeys ran away squealing with fright.” (AOM 46) It is he who masters the plan to reach the shielded island of the Techno Sage. His tiny size, in fact, proves to be a boon for him. He is able to escape danger and can slip into forbidden places.

Traditional male discourse is based upon the aspect of power hierarchy and power imbalance in which women are subordinated by men, poor by rich, people of colour by whites, animals by human beings and so on, whereas the feminist fairy tales use power as a medium to bring about peace and understanding rather than supremacy. Aditi and her friends reject violence and seek to establish their needs in harmony with the needs of others. They make use of power provided by Aditi’s grandparents in the form of the cloak of invisibility, the sword of courage and the magic clay, in self-defense, to prevent violence or to help others. The writer invests the beasts with human qualities. Her depiction of the three animals mounting on one another in order to explore and conquer the world symbolizes solidarity, rather than power hierarchy, “And so the three of them set off, the monkey on the elephant, the ant on the monkey, and the noon day sun shining on all three.” (AOM 7)

The four friends love and help each other. Their integrity and unity makes the impossible possible. Aditi is helped by all of them to tame the moisture sucking dragon. When Siril goes missing on the landing of the two dragons, they are besieged with anxiety. After they find her they attach a device upon her to know her whereabouts:

This must never happen again they all vowed, and the very next day with the help of Aditi’s grandparents they equipped the ant with an
emitter beacon. A microscopic chip was embedded in one of the ant’s legs and Aditi was given a little gadget to carry about with her. If the ant ever got lost again, the gadget would pick up the little beeps the chip emitted. (AMS 18)

They suspect other monkeys behind this mischief. The One-Eyed monkey fiercely opposes her own kinsfolk and says, “The ant is my friend. He was sleeping peacefully in his match box last night beside his clay. When we woke up this morning, he and the match box had both disappeared... we want our friend back.” (AOM 41)

Similarly, the Beautiful Ele and Monkeyji are also abetted by the other friends in locating the former’s name and the latter’s cure. The writer denigrates the insignificance associated with tiny beings such as ants and emphasizes the significance of the bond of friendship. Namjoshi rejects the materialistic, self-centred approach of capitalism in favour of stable relationships based on principles of sharing and caring. Science and technology is given a participatory role that does not enforce inequality but promotes greater social justice.

Fairy tales are not only a means of amusement for children but serve as guides that instruct and teach them. In most of the tales there is a hidden lesson that provides morals and conveys messages to them. The characters of fairy tales act as archetypes for them, and their actions and destinies, make them understand patterns of life. Jack Zipes in his famous work Don’t Bet on the Prince states:

Generations of children have read the popular fairy books, and in doing so many have absorbed far more from them than merely the outlines of the various stories. What is the precise effect that the story of Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs has upon a child? Not only do children find out what happens to the various princes and princesses, woodcutters, witches and children of their favourite tales, but they also learn behavioral and associational patterns, value systems and how to predict the consequences of specific acts or circumstances. (187)

Early writers of fairy tales have deliberately appropriated the oral folktales and altered them into a literary discourse related to values and conduct. The objective is that children and adults would be refined according to social conventions. Emancipatory tales convey morals based upon universal ideologies, rather than from any particular social group. These messages do not allow children to categorize themselves on racist, class or gender lines, but to live as free human beings.
The first set of *Aditi Adventures* emphasizes friendship, unity, love, concern, determination, courage and so on. The smaller caves in the first chronicle, *Aditi and the One-eyed Monkey* (64) impart morality. The first cave "filled with metal, broken sword blades, old horse shoes, copper vessels, golden chains, silver chains, iron chains, innumerable nails and rusty armour" leading nowhere denotes the meaninglessness of bloodshed and violence. The second cave full of precious stones such as emeralds, pearls and diamonds imparts the same lesson, while the third cave which had an opening into the ocean, is a tortuous way, "slippery and slimy and filled with seaweed" symbolizes that struggle and hard work pave the way to success.

Siril creates imaginary objects out of magic clay, but her wayward focus and lack of concentration cause the objects to flicker. This implies that concentration is needed for the pursuit and achievement of goals. The old shed of the football field where Aditi and her friends landed needed to be mended. Siril provides them with tools which do not work, "Every now and then the ant’s concentration would falter and the others would find themselves grasping empty air instead of a tool, but on the whole the ant concentrated remarkably well and they were soon done." (ATD 15)

Namjoshi also insists upon hard work. In all the four tales, she adheres to the proverb, "Try and try till you succeed". In their mission to save River Thames, they visit the British Museum to learn about river dragons. The book on dragons was kept in a glass-topped cabinet and they were running short of time to get the permission to open it. Siril- the ant crept in through a crack and turned the pages. For a minute creature, it was a difficult task, but his constant efforts get good results. He is determined to learn swimming as well, and with his hard work he is able to achieve success, "Siril tried again and again and spluttered and coughed and spluttered and coughed again and again and at last he began making a little progress. In the end he managed to do six strokes..." (ATS 8)

Like her earlier work Namjoshi inserts the aspect of Eco-feminism in children’s literature as well. She stresses upon a harmonious relationship with Nature. Flora- fauna and water bodies find a dignified place in her tales. Eco-feminism endows equality and equal rights to nature and human beings. The Hindu ideology of Pantheism that confers a soul to every animate or inanimate object influences her concept of Nature. She gives sensuous and intimate description of seas, trees, climates, continents, lakes and islands. This bond helps her to create a fantasy land with animals as prime characters. Apart from marginalized human beings, she
includes other oppressed subjects like animals, natural resources, and natural norms. The talking animals represent the intertextuality of Namjoshi’s works. Some refer to Aesop’s Fables while others are inspired by the Panchatantra. The confluence of Christianity and Hinduism can also be seen. Monkeyji in conception relates to Hanuman, the monkey-deity of The Ramayana. Beautiful Ele is inspired by Ganesha, the half-human, half-elephant Hindu god. The Blue Donkey relates to the Bible where it is the only animal who speaks. It was also the chosen animal of Christ to ride into Jerusalem.

Her concern for the pollution of the Thames produces a tale which she uses as a medium to create awareness of ecological destruction. ‘Thames Dragon’ is the offspring of the polluted Thames. The excess of litter causes the river to boil and simmer. The attempts of the twins- Roshan and Rohit to save it, shows their awareness to conserve water bodies and eco-system in order to maintain the balance of Nature. She criticizes human beings for destroying animal habitats, and appeals to them to restore the rights of the latter. These tales discuss animal and human rights and emphasize the right to freedom. The tossing of balloon fish on the sand by the fisher folk arouses the sympathy of Monkeyji and the Beautiful Ele: 

Every now and then they would pick out a fish and toss it on the sand. These fish would lie there looking very unhappy. Eventually, each one would inflate a large balloon at the base of its throat and go on lying there. The one-eyed monkey felt sorry for them. She began to pick them up and toss them into the ocean. The elephant helped her. (AOM 23)

Her anger against considering women a commodity is depicted in Aditi’s comment about the dragon. When Monkeyji assumes that she was monkey-dragon, she demands the possession of Aditi as a bargain. Aditi replies indignantly, “But I can’t be owned. I’m not an object.” (AOM 54)

Classical fairy tales contain sexist and racist attitudes and serve a socialization process. They place great stress upon submissiveness and self-sacrifice, incarceration in homes for girls, and upon competition and accumulation of wealth for boys. They encourage children to emulate fixed gender roles and thus curtail their free development. Namjoshi’s fairy tales on the other hand aim at a just society that can be gleaned from the redirectional socialization process. Her tales provide equal status to both young boys and girls without discriminating. She emphasizes equal participation
of children in every sphere of life. Like other fairy tale writers she provides equal opportunities and elevates girls to remove social biases. She defines how the messages in old tales tend to limit and restrict children rather than set them free to make their own choices. Emphasizing education for both the sexes, she presents a classroom scene of a school in England uplifting Roshan, the girl child among the twins:

Roshan and Rohit were sitting in their classroom trying to concentrate on their maths, but it was hard to do so. It was two days now since they had sent their letter. Normally, both Roshan and Rohit paid attention in class. They were twins. Roshan was older than Rohit by a full five minutes and this made her feel she ought to be more responsible...

(ATD 8)

The depiction of the one-eyed monkey as an educated being signifies that the acquisition of education is free to all, even to an unprivileged creature such as a one-eyed monkey. Sirl- the ant is also crazy about reading maps and eager to learn new words.

The portrayal of city life teeming with school going children, over-crowded roads, multiple means of transportation and mass media, television, newspaper, internet and radios projects the changing conditions of the contemporary world. She highlights the transformations brought about by capitalist production, global relations and advanced technologies. The writer tries to create a familiar world with which the new generation can identify themselves. Being Utopian/Dystopian, these tales are enriched with advanced scientific technologies that project weird gadgets such as Bathyspheres, glass-submarine, Time-stretching jewels, emitter beacons etc. However, where these electronic devices prove to be accommodating, they also have their side effects.

On their adventure to Canada, they come across the Techno Sage, a scientist, who had her memory affected by the over use of the time-stretching jewel while producing anti-gravity pads. She is disoriented and confused about the order in which things happened. Moreover, her experiments on those pads caused earth quakes in the Stony Lake, disturbing and terrifying the aquatic animals. The sage explained:

"I had to experiment first to see how I could navigate through space with the help of the anti-gravity pads."

"And then what happened?" all of them asked.
“Cataclysms and earth quakes,” the sage replied dolefully. (ATS 58)

These modern tales appear to be the fusion of the binaries i.e. the East and the West, dragons and sages etc. The protagonist, Aditi is an Indian who lives near the west- coast of the Indian sub- continent, while the twins whom the adventurers meet in London- Roshan and Rohit, are the immigrants living away from their motherland. The writer elevates the status of her native land after calling it a ‘well- ordered world’. (ATD 23) The secular tales allow the young readers to identify themselves with the background irrespective of race or class. She is an anti- racist who has encountered racial discrimination in the West. Thus she is familiar with the difficulties one faces in an alien world. The monkey folk in Aditi and the One-Eyed Monkey mock at the ant and the elephant for being alien and for being the friends of one of the monkeys of their own clan, “The monkeys were looking decidedly embarrassed. Finally one of them said, “You have chosen some strange companions for yourself. You are a monkey. And ant is an ant. What has an ant to do with us?” (AOM 41) They also comment on the huge size of the elephant after she interrupts, “It speaks,” squeaked a monkey. “That grey, fat bag actually speaks. What else can it do? Let’s prod it and see.” (AOM 45) Monkeys seek to be superior to human beings and thus, they ridicule Aditi, “Look, it’s a little girl. She has a brown face and no fur at all except on her head. What a funny girl.” (AOM 45)

Dragons and Sages are other binaries in patriarchy that are discussed. Namjoshi tries to reduce the gap between these polarities and fuse them together. She recapitulates the idea of identity fluidity and says, as stated earlier as well that there is no rigid identity in the world. The fixed notions and attributes associated with sex and gender roles are discarded. Similarly, the fixed attributes related to dragons’ and sages’ identities are considered absurd. She distorts the myths associated with the adamant roles depicted in classical tales of dragon and sages. Goldie- the island dragon is portrayed to be lazy, cowardly and sloth. The ones in traditional tales are ferocious, powerful and blood- thirsty. During their first journey Aditi and her friends are terrified at the thought of facing the dragon, but when they reach they find it to be lazy and indifferent, “Inside the cave the dragon sprawled out. “I’m going to sleep for an hour or two. When I wake up, I will set you your tasks.”/ The four adventurers huddled together. Things weren’t going at all as they had planned. They were all annoyed by the dragon’s behaviour.” (AOM 62) When the dragon did not listen to them and tried to over- power them, Aditi challenged it to fight and slashed its paw,
“Suddenly the dragon lashed out at Aditi but Aditi was too quick for it and slashed its paw. The sight of its own blood appalled the dragon.” (AOM 69) The transformed attitude of the dragon from foe to friend symbolizes that even a huge and supposedly dangerous creature can be won over by friendship. The writer is sarcastic about violent human nature and rescues monsters by disrupting the fixed established identity of being blood thirsty. On their adventure to England, Rohit assures:

“With your dragon we are sure you will be able to over come our River Dragon.”

“Hold on!” cried the dragon. “Dragons are not allowed to fight each other, and besides I’m not sure I would win if I fought a River Dragon. And anyway, I don’t want to.”

“But people fight each other,” Rohit remarked. He was taken aback by the dragon’s response.
The dragon just looked stubborn. “That may be as it may be. Perhaps in that particular respect dragons have more sense than people.” (ATD 12- 13)

However, Namjoshi tries to demythicize the conventions related to dragons; she also questions the nature of their existence. As the existence of dragons is a myth, the stereotypical attributes attached to them too are mythical. When Roshan and Rohit take the dragons as news item to Ms Jenkins, the latter refused to put them on television calling them unreal:

“But these aren’t real dragons. These are some sort of exotic lizards. Real dragons would be a news item.”

“But these are real dragons,” Roshan protested.

“What do you mean by ‘unreal dragons’?”

Ms Jenkins laughed. “I suppose by ‘real dragons’ I mean ‘unreal dragons’- the mythical creatures the kind that don’t exist.” (ATD 61)

Sharks are considered to be brutal and fierce, but Namjoshi’s shark is projected as shy and scared. When Aditi and her friends contact her to find out the address of the Marine Sage, says she:

“Won’t turn around,” Baby Shark wailed. “Go away. You’re frightening me…”

“But please, why won’t you turn around?”

“It’s obvious, isn’t it?” Baby Shark wailed.
“It’s because I’m shy. I don’t like to meet anyone face to face,” (AMS 33-34)

Similarly, the stereotypical identity of the sages is related to goodness, supremacy, virtues, knowledge, enlightenment, gods etc., whereas the sages of Namjoshi are not always supreme. Though they are powerful, they need the help of the four friends. The Island Sage asks for their help to convey her message to her sisters. They help the Marine Sage to breathe air. They rescue the Techno Sage from the irrational attitude of sun-fish. The Techno Sage is blamed by the latter for not being able to keep her promises. They say:

“She doesn’t keep her promises.”

“She’s a liar.”

“She says something has happened when it hasn’t happened yet, and she has only thought it was going to happen.” (ATS 52)

Conventionally sages are remote and religious but Namjoshi’s sages are modern beings who believe in technology and rationality.

The writer also discusses the biases attached to size. She is of the opinion that success is not achieved on the basis of being large. Small creatures such as ants could be more worthy than large animals. The huge Goldie could not fit in Shedwell Park as buildings would be destroyed. When ant desires to be as big as the elephant, Rohit consoles him and admires him as he is. He says, “if you were as big as a dragon or even only as big as an elephant, you would probably be the strongest creature on earth./ Yes Roshan replied. “For their size ants are quite extraordinarily strong.” (ATD 40)

The distortion of the fixed notions illustrates the fluidity of identity. In Aditi and the One-Eyed Monkey, we see the shifting patterns of identity. While dealing with the dragon, all the four friends pretended to be the dragon. There is Ant-Dragon, Monkey – Dragon and Aditi-Dragon. Identity could not be said to be rigid as again the River Dragon, Opal has no colour of herself. She is transparent and can merge with any background:

The River Dragon was no colour and every colour. She was all the colours that water can be. Sometimes they could see her shape in the water, and sometimes it looked as though she has merged with the water and it was hard to say which was which. (ATD 28)

She also points out that if something is good for one it is not necessarily good for the other. The Marine Sage in Aditi and the Marine Sage finds comfort in water and
suffocation on land. She identifies herself more with aquatic animals as she has developed gills.

All the animals are introduced nameless in the first tale of the series, but gradually they acquire identity. Ant is named Siril, Monkey- Monkeyji and Elephant- the Beautiful Ele. We witness these animals as they engage in existential dilemma and also watch the quest to over come it. Beautiful Ele is worried and struggles hard to find her name inscribed on a polished stone. It is at their third adventure to Australia that she finds the right whale that has swallowed up the stone on which her name was inscribed and her quest for identity ends. Her idea of providing identity to unprivileged animals is an attempt to give a chance to the subalterns and to elevate them.

Like many of her earlier texts this series of tales too appears as self referential. We find the glimpses of Namjoshi’s own experiences in the whole series. She starts from the western coastal region of India, her native land and reaches England, Australia and Canada, the countries explored by her in her real life. She gives vivid pictures of the four worlds and connects India with the worship of animals such as lionesses, cows and elephants. She associates Australia with seas and oceans, and England and Canada with technology. The tales also depict the queer aspect of her writings. The association of the three sages depicts the idea of sisterhood, introduced by American feminists. Cheri Register informs:

The feminist movement in America is seeking to create a feeling of sisterhood, a new sense of community among women, in order to overcome self- hatred, the animosity that many women feel for others of their sex as a result of isolation, competition for male attention, and belief in female inferiority. (Register 213)

Namjoshi’s partners too have lived in these countries with whom she has been parted. The Island sage’s desire to meet them appears to be the writer’s unfulfilled aspiration of her past to achieve her own love or sisterhood. It also illustrates the loneliness of the Island Sage and her attempt to overcome that isolation in the company of her two sisters.

All the four tales attempt to explore the psyche of children of the contemporary modern world. While providing amusement to children, the tales establish respect and affinity with creatures other than the Anglo- Saxon heterosexual
male. They break down stereotypes, boundaries and categories and challenge the stringency of norms applied to society by patriarchy.

**Aditi Adventures II- Unexpected Monsters**

*Aditi Adventures II* entitled *The Unexpected Monsters* is the second part of the series. Aditi and her friends meet characters from European myths, such as Sybil of Cumae, Grendel, the Budapest Changeling, the Vesuvian Giant, and Shemeek. These are liberating tales. They not only emancipate the mythical characters from stereotypes but they also liberate the readers from passive reading conventions. The feminist fairy tales can be read in multiple ways. According to Jack Zipes, in *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion* the cultural patterns of the West are directly linked to two major types of experimentation. The first is transfiguration, and the other is the fusion of traditional configuration with contemporary references. In the first type the author presents the familiar classical tales in a distinct manner, while in the second, unfamiliar new tales are produced with classical patterns:

In the first type, generally the author assumes that the young reader is already familiar with the classical tale and depicts the familiar in an estranging fashion. Consequently, the reader is compelled to consider the negative aspects of anachronistic forms and perhaps transcend them. The tendency is to break, shift, debunk, or rearrange the traditional motifs to liberate the reader from the contrived and programmed mode of literary reception...The second type of experimentation, similar to transfiguration, can be called the fusion of traditional configurations with contemporary references within settings and plotlines unfamiliar to readers yet designed to arouse their curiosity and interest. Fantastic projections are used here to demonstrate the changeability of contemporary social relations, and the fusion brings together all possible means for illuminating a concrete utopia. (177-78)

These two experimentations are conducted to eliminate the readers' rigid attitude towards the status quo of society and demonstrate manners to recognize their individuality within autonomous framework.
The Unexpected Monsters belongs to the second category as described by Zipes. The tales are a fusion of the traditional European mythical figures with contemporary characters. They raise questions about identity, power, beauty and mythicism. They also deal with issues of raising children, of morality, arbitrary authoritarianism and of supremacy.

The first tale of the second pack, Aditi and her Friends take on the Vesuvian Giant (AFVG), revolves round the themes of friendship, power and strength. The tale begins with the disappearance of Goldie and the quest of her friends. The clue that a golden dragon was seen diving into the blue grotto, leads Aditi and her friends to move to the hillside of Cumae in Italy. There they come in contact with Sybil, the omniscient, who informs them about the enslavement of Goldie by the Vesuvian Giant in the magic mirror. She also teaches them the trick of taming the Giant.

Aditi and her Friends meet Grendel (AFMG) is the second tale of Aditi Adventures II that depicts their journey to Devon in order to solve the mystery of the Deep Rose which helps Aditi’s grand mother to recover from her illness. The objective of the journey is to find Grendel and his mother and thus solicit the blessings and good wishes of the grandmother. The tale aims at solving the existential dilemma and providing answers to the existing oedipal conflicts within children.

Another adventure of the series, Aditi and her friends help the Budapest Changeling (AFBC), represents the journey to Budapest, Hungary. Siril, the Ant finds himself bobbing in his matchbox along a river bank with a little unstable creature which changes according to the perception of observers. This small being is a Budapest Changeling who kidnaps Siril. Aditi and her friends reach River Danube to find Siril. Later they help the Changeling in quest of her identity. The Changeling rescues Beautiful from the clutches of the Old Woman who lived in a shoe.

The last tale is Aditi and her Friends in search of Shemeek (AFSS) in which the four adventurers along with the two dragons reach Prague in Czech Republic on an official visit. A spell is cast upon Monkeyji by the naughty granddaughter of Princess Libusha causing her to lose the capability to speak the truth. The remedy lays with Shemeek- the snow white horse who sleeps behind the rock of Wysherad, dreaming about the world. All the adventurers set off in search of Shemeek to find solutions for the misery of Monkeyji and to teach a lesson to the little girl. Meanwhile, they encounter Old Fiery Blue, the good-hearted dragon whose duty is to guard the sleeping Shemeek.
Namjoshi has recreated the classical figures to question the fixed popular notions associated with them. The man-eating Grendel and his mother of Beowulf are now projected as quiet and serene creatures who live peacefully off the southwest coast of England. Beautiful informs:

Grendel is gorgeous! He has one or two problems, but he's all right. And as for Madame Grendel, I'm pretty sure she's perfectly nice. They just look different. After all, somebody who had never seen an elephant might think I was a monster too. (AFMG 35)

The writer deconstructs the old Scandinavian myth in England. Hundreds of years ago the mother and son lived in Scandinavia and later migrated to Devon, England in protest against the Scandinavian writer for projecting them as monsters. Aditi's grandmother conceals their identity and addresses them as G and Madame G, for their full names frighten people. According to the Greek legend:

Sibyl, also called Sibylla, prophetess in Greek legend and literature. Tradition represented her as a woman of prodigious old age uttering predictions in ecstatic frenzy, but she was always the figure of mythical past, and her prophecies, in Greek hexameters, were handed down in writing. In the fifth and fourth century B.C., she was always referred to in the singular; Sibylla was treated as her proper name, and she was apparently located at Asia Minor. From the late fourth century the number of Sibyls was multiplied; they were localized traditionally at all the famous oracle centres and elsewhere... (Encyclopaedia Britannica)

Sybil, the ill-natured old woman turns out to be helpful. She is projected as a witch-like figure who in traditional tales is an agent of evil but also signifies erotic and dissident forces that fascinate the readers. She is a sinister force historically, but in Namjoshi surprisingly, she has a soft corner and thus gets ready to help the adventurers.

The Vesuvian Giant who is considered furious and bad-tempered imprisons Goldie in order to befriend him. The Giant and Grendel's insomnia and the Old Woman's yearning for someone to talk about, illustrate the modern context marked by isolation and breakdown of communication. All these instances distort the stereotypical notions associated with classical archetypes. The Budapest Changeling's transformation who according to the myth is a hideous creature "who is suspected not
to be a couple’s real child” and “was substituted by fairies” (Vocabulary. Com), highlights Monkeyji’s remark, “Monsterrity is in the eye of the beholder” (35) The writer suggests that identity formed on the basis of patriarchal dictates mutates and trans mutates. Barthes in Mythologies points out:

There is no fixity in mythical concepts: They can come into being, alter, disintegrate, disappear completely (and that around the meaning of myth) there is a halo of virtualities where other possible meanings are floating. (Barthes 130)

The writer also breaks the myth of Beauty associated with women. She frees Beauty from the patriarchal mirror after projecting Aditi and her friends as rational beings. Unlike the step- mother of Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, who is flattered by the words of the flattering mirror, they are not mesmerized by the magic mirror of the Giant that is representative of patriarchy. The tale breaks the patriarchal frame that has sought to oppress young girls and women after confining them to the idea of cultivating beauty for male appreciation. In AFVG, it is only Goldie who gets trapped by it. “Goldie looked and looked at this pleasing new Goldie and in a few seconds the mirror trapped him. He’s the giant’s prisoner under the grotto on Capri” (29). The others who are not seduced by the mirror escape. Beauty and mirror are linked to each other in a vicious circle symbolizing imprisonment. The breaking of the mirror and Goldie’s freedom are symbolic of the shattering of the patriarchal myth and the granting of liberty to young girls. Marcia K. Lieberman in “Some Day My Prince Will Come: Female Acculturation Through the Fairy Tales” remarks, “These stories have been made the repositories of the dreams, hopes and fantasies of generations of girls... The beauty contest is a constant and primary device in many of the stories.” (187)

Namjoshi is of the view that by altering and introducing unusual elements into the fairy tales, the child is compelled to discard a certain consistent reception and reconsider their constituents and meaning. As children are the primary audience of fairy tales, these tales play an important role in early socialization. Feminist fairy tales’ writers try to change our outlook and defy our perception with regard to literature and society. Saints, Angels, Monsters, Dragons, Witches, all have been perceived with fixed identities. The emancipatory feminist writers such as Angela Carter, Margaret Attwood and Suniti Namjoshi, revise, rewrite and deconstruct the
established popular ideas and bring forth the familiar and previously discussed notion of identity fluidity. Adrienne Rich points out:

Revision- the act of looking back of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction is for women more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival. Until we can understand the assumptions in which we are drenched we cannot know ourselves... We need to know the writing of the past, and know it differently than we have ever known it; not to pass on a tradition but to break its hold over us. (Rich 35)

Namjoshi considers identity fixation an illusion. In *Aditi Adventures*, the shifting patterns of identity are projected through the changing attributes of Baby Shark. Sometimes she acquires different colours, at other times she floats in the air instead of moving in water. She informs the adventurers, “That was the Marine Sage’s gift. I can float up to three feet above the earth or above any solid object... I can become invisible if I try hard, but only for a short time.” (AFVG 8-9) Julia Kristeva in her essay “Woman Can Never Be Defined”, comments on the instability of language, meaning and subjectivity, and coins the term ‘subject in process’ to express the sense of the subject as not whole and never stable. Proceeding the idea of Kristeva, Namjoshi talks about the multiplicity of identity through the Budapest Changeling’s remark, “All I know is that I can be anyone and do anything.” (AFBC 12) Sometimes he is a magpie, to Beautiful he appears as a large rat with a black handkerchief tied around his face, sometimes he is a monkey, the other time he transforms into a mini dragon. The writer says that our identities are always called into question and brought under assessment. She is interested in how ideology works and how individuals freely adopt positions which, often are not in their interests. The Budapest Changeling acquires identity on the basis of the perception of others. He says, “And I knew all about being all sorts of things... You just become whoever they think you are. I do it all the time”. (AFBC’ 19) Changeling’s character is an emblem of the ‘pre-oedipal stage’ of Freud’s psychoanalytic theory, in which the child has a fragmentary identity or no identity at all, as Changeling points out, “When I look in a mirror... I see nothing at all.” (21)

Namjoshi’s stories assist in psychological development and discovery of the self. Later, Changeling objects to Aditi when she categorizes him as a fish. Thus he rejects established roles. He pleads to the adventurers to help him in his quest for true
identity. Namjoshi subscribes to Lacanian theory of ‘mirror stage’ in which the child acquires his/her complete being. The adventurers help Sir Sparrow in eradicating all his doubts related to his true being. Sir Sparrow pretends to be an extraordinary pompous bird and paints himself white with powder. He is disillusioned when Aditi paints him pink in order to teach her a lesson for refusing to help others.

"...Sir Sparrow looked like a perfectly ordinary sparrow, beautifully marked in brown and grey and black.

"You are no longer white!" Beautiful exclaimed.

"That was just powder," Sir Sparrow mumbled, "to make me look smart."


This so pleased Sir Sparrow that he flew into the air and settled himself behind Beautiful's left ear. (AFSS 64)

Beautiful's appraisal of Sir Sparrow is an act of consolation meant to guide children in times of difficulty. The adventurers also console Siril and boost her morale when she decides to take the challenge of the Vesuvian Giant.

Fairy tales are of immense help to children in resolving their oedipal conflicts. During the years from three to six, children's understanding of the world is muddled with contradictory feelings. Fairy tales solve confusions. Grendel's oedipal attachment to his mother does not allow him to grow out of the fear that during the process of maturation his love may be transferred to his beloved. His mother has no identity but Grendel's mother or Madame Grendel. It also illustrates the patriarchal notion of not granting autonomy to women. Grendel lives in an illusionary world and suffers from existential dilemma and wants to escape from the responsibilities of adulthood. He remarks:

"I'm already quite big and strong... and as for getting older, I'm not sure that's such a good thing. I'd spend all my time worrying like my mother, or being troubled by aches and pains like Monkeyji... I don't want to be responsible for anything... I'm Grendel... and I play all day and live with my mother underneath the sea. (AFMG 45)

Fairy tales are considered therapies for children as they open up unexplored spheres. They help children to control their lives. A characteristic feature of fairy tale is to sort out existential quandary or quest for identity. This enables children to deal
with crises and predicaments. Children are thus able to master the psychological problems of maturation by “overcoming narcissistic disappointments, oedipal dilemmas, sibling rivalries, becoming able to relinquish childhood dependencies, gaining a feeling of selfhood and of self-worth, and a sense of moral obligation... They offer new dimensions to the child’s imagination which would be impossible for him to discover as truly as his own.” (Bettelheim 6-7)

The existential dilemma of Rose becomes the topic of debate among the adventurers in AFMG. They struggle hard to unearth the reality of Deep Rose. For Beautiful it is a fragrance, Siril thinks of it as a colour, for Monkeyji it is a state of mind, while Aditi calls it a story. The writer thus explains the multiple aspects of life. She claims that stories are either imaginative or based on facts or experiences. Stories may or may not be true. They are the sources of entertainment and help to see ‘differently and understand the meaning of something that wasn’t clear before.’ (25) The writer defends myths and fairy tales. According to her, stories alone cannot ensure children’s progress. They disrupt the imagination of the child with harsh intervention. Fairy tales alter reality and confer liberty to the imagination and transform difficult situations artistically. Favat remarks:

Children’s turning to the tale is no casual recreation or pleasant diversion, instead, it is an insistent search for an ordered world more satisfying than the real one, a sober striving to deal with the crisis of experience they are undergoing. In such a view, it is even possible, regardless of one’s attitude towards bibliotherapy, to see the child’s turning to the tale as a salutary utilization of an implicit device of the culture. It would appear, moreover, that after reading a fairy tale, the reader invests the real world with the constructs of the tale. (Favat 54)

Aditi Adventures employ the technique of fantasy effectively. The writer finds it significant to explore freely the psyche of children and examine the material condition of reality. She employs animal imagery along with magic and reality. These tales offer interaction between animal and human world. As a proponent of eco-feminism, Namjoshi provides equal status to flora and fauna. The only human being is Aditi, while all her friends are personified animals. Ant, Elephant, and Monkey possess human emotions that provide them a higher position. There are vivid descriptions of a variety of English Roses. We are introduced to Blessings, Mary Rose, The Thornless Rose, Zephrine Drouhin, Peace etc. Namjoshi’s love for roses
surfaces in the visit of the adventurers to the garden centre. Their happiness and enthusiasm is visible while selecting flowers for Aditi’s grandmother-the Queen:

Meanwhile Siril had decided on a rose called *Peace*.

“This one’s not even pink!” Grendel protested, looking at the picture attached to the rose bush.

“Well, it has a bit of pink in it,” Siril replied.

He tried to defend his choice. “There’s something about the way it makes one feel when one looks into its yellow depths that’s quite extraordinary...” His voice trailed off. “I’m sure she’ll like this one,” he said suddenly sounding more and more sure.

They were pleased and excited by their purchases and wondered which one the queen would like best... (AFMG 63)

Fantasy merged with aspects of ecofeminism, magic and creativity is not only an escape from the real world but also a morale booster to children. They forget their despair and misery and also learn lessons of goodness, caring and sharing. The writer makes use of magic when evoking the legendary figures to life. The magic she applies is not to deceive but to enlighten the readers as it prepares them for the trials of daily life. Grendel’s remark about growing older paradoxically encourages children to get wiser with age:

“I’m not all that young”, Grendel replied. “I’m hundreds of years old. And my mother, well, she’s probably thousands of years old. It’s just that we grow very, very slowly. And anyway, for the past fifty years I haven’t grown at all.” (33)

The amazing stillness of Time for Grendel and his forgetfulness, illustrates the importance of Memory and Responsibility with increasing age. Sybil, the Vesuvian Giant and the Magic Mirror associated with fear also involve fantasy. Elen Moers in *Literary Women* points out, “in Gothic writing fantasy predominates over reality, the strange over the common place, and the supernatural over the natural, all with one intent to scare at a basic level” (6) Sybil of AFMG, is introduced to the readers as a terrible creature sitting alone and crying in the corridors dimly lit by phosphorescence. The Old Woman who lives in a shoe accommodates herself, in a single shoe. She informs the Changeling:

...This one-legged giant had two shoes, two fine, large leather boots.

The one that he really used got all dusty and worn out; but the other
one- this one that I’ve got- managed to stay shiny and new. The giant had a wooden leg, of course, but as the giant swung along on his crutches, this one barely touched the ground." (AFBC 59)

The spell of the naughty grand daughter of Princess Libusha cast upon Monkeyji and the counter spell of the latter on the former, mesmerize the readers and exhort children not to be naughty. The writer describes various ways of raising, comforting and controlling children for their mischief and misconduct. She discusses the anxiety of parents with spoilt children and the readiness of adventurers to help them. Madame G laments in a sorrowful voice on the effect of slowing time on Grendel:

"Each time he falls asleep, he forgets everything that has happened after the moment my experiment changed him. When he wakes, he begins again. Everything’s fresh. Everything’s new. Whatever he has learned, he doesn’t remember... I would like him to grow." (AFMG 40- 42)

Princess Libusha accepts her grand daughter’s misconduct and remarks, “Yes, I know. I’m very glad Shemeek was able to help you. She’s a very naughty child and needs to mend her ways... I apologize for her. I see that she is indeed extremely spoilt. What shall we do for her?” (AFSS 59- 65) The adventurers not only controlled the Vesuvian Giant but also children such as Libusha’s grand daughter and Grendel. They solve problems within problems. Each time they are able to solve one riddle, another takes its place. This, too, they resolve with enthusiasm and cooperation. Their methods by which they help Grendel to come out of his illusions and subsequently grow wise with age guide parents in bringing up problem children. Their wisdom adheres to the idea that willingness is a pre-requisite to learning. It is only after Grendel gets ready to remember things he is able to overcome his difficulty. He feels sorry for his behaviour and says, “I would remember things... I’m sure I would remember. Well I would try to remember.” (AFMG 48) Princess Libusha’s grand daughter and Sir Sparrow repent lesson for their mischief. Sir Sparrow says, “... I’m truly sorry I was so unhelpful.” (AFSS 64) The sudden disappearance of Beautiful helps the Budapest Changeling to be a responsible being. He assists Beautiful in her escape from the Old Woman who lived in a shoe. On their quest for Goldie the adventurers tame the Vesuvian Giant and mould him into a good person. The Giant is like the usual giants of traditional tales. He is strong, furious and shrewd and spews lava and causes earth- quakes. Siril, a tiny being fights the giant in order to get out of
his hold. In the strong and powerful projection of Siril infused with the ‘grow large’ potion, Namjoshi dismantles the notions associated with size as depicted earlier in the first part of the series. “...he picked up Opal and Goldie and set them down gently a few feet away/ The others were too astonished to say anything. They had had no idea that for his size Siril was so extraordinarily strong.” (AFVG 54) With their constant efforts, the Giant is then transformed into a good giant with the intake of ‘good tempered’ potion given by Sybil. At the end the Giant says, “I may not have won, but I got the prize!” (61)

Life is depicted as a struggle. The ‘happy end’ is the real beginning of growth. There is victory of good over evil, as evil transforms into virtue. Aditi and her friends come into their own and help others in difficult situations. The readers are left with the question, ‘who wins’? The tales, unlike other modern tales, have happy ending but with innovative insights. The adventurers are anti-violence but sometimes they are compelled to raise their swords for the cause of good. The battles that are fought, the wars that are made, are cold one, not only to avenge but to help others in their development. Tolkein opines that the sad endings of modern fairy tales eliminate the aspect of comfort and escape that separate both children and adults from anxiety. He stresses the happy ending of all fairy tales so that wicked forces will be overcome and never again terrorize the child’s psyche. All the tales of Aditi adventures have happy endings in which everything is sorted out and Aditi and her friends depart happily.

As there is free play of imagination, fairy tales leave all decisions to the readers. The reader is free either to read implications of morals and messages or simply enjoy the fantastic events. AFBC emphasizes hard work and prohibits stealing. When the adventurers are starving, Changeling offers them stolen food, but Monkeyji objects, “We shouldn’t really steal things, we should pay for things...the first thing we have to do is earn some money.” (22-31) They struggle hard to sell tickets in Budapest for the fire and water show to be performed by Goldie and Opal along the bank of River Danube. AFSS stresses truth, duty and respect for others. Monkeyji considers falsehood a burden. When she is relieved of the charm of Libusha’s grand daughter, she thanks Shemeek and says, “...It’s a relief to be able to say what one thinks, instead of constantly having to think up a falsehood if one is going to speak at all.” (35) Sir Sparrow and Libusha’s grand daughter are punished for their misconducts. The liberating tales define universal messages and ethical values. They also suggest ways of raising voices against suppression and authoritarianism.
As previously discussed, Aditi Adventures are anti-war and anti-violence tales in which the protagonist and her friends get ready to combat containment and domination. They evaluate supremacy and the possibility for collective democratic life that encourages peaceful co-existence. They fight the giant to relieve Goldie from his authoritarianism. They also unite to liberate Monkeyji of the spell of Libusha’s grand daughter, and Beautiful of the Old Woman who lived in a shoe.

The tales are primarily created for children. However they are enriched with witty and clever remarks that make them philosophical. The statements made by the characters exhort the readers think deeply. Beautiful asks Changeling, “Which comes first?... Do you behave like a mischievous monkey and so people think you are one? Or do people think you are mischievous monkey and so you behave like one?” (AFBC 18) Grendel asks Beautiful about his habit to forget and the latter explains:

“...if I didn’t remember, would I not be me?”
“How could you be you today if you didn’t remember who you were yesterday?” Beautiful replied.
“It’s a bit confusing,” Grendel muttered.
“Is remembering the same as learning?”
“...And is learning the same thing as growing?” (AFMG 58)

The writer seems to be quite familiar with different parts of the world. In all the four tales of the series she explores four diverse cultures of various European countries. She starts the adventure from Italy and then moves to Devon in England, her present home place. Then she takes the readers from Hungary to Czech Republic and familiarizes them with mountains, hills, rivers, language and people. Blue grotto, Island Capri, Mount Vesuvious, Cumae, clotted cream of Devon, Mogra flowers of India, forints- the currency of Hungary, tomb of Gul Baba, Kiraly Baths, River Danube, all are described in an overwhelming manner.

The Unexpected Monsters is concerned with legendary characters of Europe, recast by the writer to dismantle biases associated with them. The tales act as directories to liberate children from ego disturbances with the use of fantasy that has the power to make the unfamiliar familiar. They also serve as guides for parents to deal with the difficulties of taming and raising children in an appropriate manner. The witty dialogues on identity and perception, lend the text a philosophical touch.
Aditi Adventures III - Heroes

Heroes is the third of the series Aditi Adventures. There is never one hero rather there are multiple male and female protagonists who are either human or animal. They follow their inclinations, respect each other’s needs and talents, and share each other’s visions. Together they overcome sinister forces that want to deprive them of happiness. They work towards the realization of an ideal community. Like earlier tales, these also could be categorized under Feminist Science Fiction. They are intended to be the ‘blueprints of social and technological improvements in the actual world.’ (Abrams 328) The four adventurers- Aditi, Beautiful, Siril and Monkeyji along with their other friends- the two dragons, Goldie and Opal, Gardy- the smallest of the lion cubs and the three sages continue to travel to the distant countries in order to build an ideal world. The tales deal with the idea of power and supremacy, rationality, advancement in technology, race, cyberspace, language and grammar.

The first tale of the series Gardy in the City of Lions (GCL) is a satire on contemporary rulers. According to a legend Gardy is received as the lost lion cub prince at the City of Lions- Singapore pre-destined to save the place. He arrives with his friends and gets trapped in the diplomacies of the squabbling guardians of the city who are more concerned about their own interest and supremacy rather than public gain. The tale deals with the questions of rationality, logic and clarity.

Monkeyji and the Word Eater (MWE), the second tale of Aditi Adventures III takes into account the importance of words and names in defining subjective existence. The questions raised by the writer provide the tale with a linguistic angle. She questions whether a name and existence of an individual are directly proportional to each other, or whether there an arbitrary relationship between the two. Aditi and her friends get messages from Grendel about the problems created by his cousin Otto- the Word Eater, in Hong Kong. Monkeyji holds the command and teaches him, with her friends’ assistance how to overcome his problems.

The third tale of the series is Siril and the Spaceflower (SSP) that deals with the humanitarian notion of concern for all including heavenly bodies such as Europa, one of the three moons of the planet Jupiter. The tale is a significant example of a feminist science fiction submerged in gentle emotions. The writer compares the two vital notions i.e. rationality and sentiments and questions their importance.
Beautiful and the Cyberspace Runaway (BCR), is a modern, fantastic tale of a computer programme- Mistress i, who runs away from a hardware in order to free herself from her own programmer, Vidvanji and the confined cyberspace. She takes refuge behind the right ear of Beautiful. Vidvanji runs after in to capture her. The adventurers help her to escape. The tale deals with aspects of liberty and connects cyberspace with the real world.

Even though the setting of the tales is Indian, they cater to children of all races, classes and genders. Namjoshi describes all the continents in order to help children identify with the familiar worlds. In this series, she explores the worlds which have been ignored and mystified i.e. the third world Asian countries such as Singapore, Hong Kong and India, as well as the remote Europa.

She contrasts the hi-tech world of rationality with the sentimental, and magic world. On one hand she promotes objective, value-neutral decision making and imparts feminist ethics according to which justice, morality and rationality are the basis for ethical judgment, and moral autonomy, and on the other she points out that excessive rationality could lead to the destruction of human and non-human world.

She projects her characters as wise, logical and rational and able to find solutions to problems. Monkeyji and others succeed in convincing the Sea Guardian to stop threatening Sir Leon- the Land Guardian through their wisdom. They trick her to remove the last threat. They intimidate her into revealing her the great financial loss in public and force the old woman to compromise (GCL 42). The adventurers also act sensibly while dealing with Otto- the Word Eater and in rescuing Mistress i. Monkeyji commands her friends not to give any words to Otto as he might eat their names and kill their identity. She orders, “DO NOT TRY TO DEAL WITH HIM. Come and get me. And if at all possible, do not say anything. Do not give him any words to snatch, especially not your own names.” (MWE 23-24) The eating away of names and the loss of identity raises the supreme question viz whether existence is dependent on the names. Goldie loses his identity as he becomes the victim of the word-eater. He was unable to remember who he was or what he was doing in Hong Kong. Once again, the adventurers get his identity back. Beautiful Ele is so obsessed with the idea of logic and reason that she decides not to go on a holiday and prefers to spend her time in practicing to become ‘rational, sensible and logical’. Siril considers her too emotional. She is helped by Aditi’s grandmother in Mathematics, by Monkeyji in meditation, by Aditi in syntax and logic, while Siril assists her in removing the
confusions of directions. Beautiful’s yearning is a source of motivation for children to learn and attain education. She uses her female character to explore different facets of lesbianism.

Namjoshi considers rationality to be gender-neutral and non-Eurocentric, and the knowledge of science to be objective and democratic. In Aditi tales, Aditi and her friends are able to operate computers and internet and make use of hi-tech gadgets independently and irrespective of any gender or racial biases. They participate and help each other in the building of the space-ship for the voyage to one of the three moons of Jupiter. Emails and messages are exchanged when required. The advanced scientific technologies are used all the time. Grendel’s e-mails in connection with his cousin- Otto in the form of hi-tech 3D images of butterflies are a significant example of advanced use of science:

"Those butterflies are new type of email messages," she began.

"Do you mean that it’s now possible to send three-dimensional images instead of just two-dimensional ones?" Siril asked. "I knew that work was being done to make that possible. Were they digital butterflies?"

(MWE 11)

All the adventurers collectively build the Spaceflower. Siril can remember the location of every single part of the spaceship. The Techno Sage supervises everything while others help in tying knots of copper wires and supply of tools. They worked unitedly during the journey from earth to space.

Vidvanji’s invention of a Personal Pocket Companion (PPC) disintegrates the belief that Science is the property of the West. She promotes Feminist Empiricism. According to Sandra Harding, the methodologies and values of science are the best ways to eradicate masculinist and Eurocentric values and to promote objectivity.

Vidvanji is an Indian scientist who is projected as a genius. He invents a pocket companion named, Mistress i:

It turned out that he had invented a little Personal Pocket Companion, a thing that was to be part friend, part pet and part computer. It would bond with a particular individual and then be with them for life." (BCR 29)

Namjoshi adheres to what Harding says. She claims that within the dominant discourse certain methodologies and modes of research have been made to appear usual/natural. She suggests structural and procedural transformation in science to
increase the level of egalitarianism and neutrality and to understand that all knowledge is the result of local knowledge systems.

*Aditi Adventures* apply feminist aspects to raise awareness in children and to provide alternatives for pursuing goals and developing autonomy. Namjoshi is against conformation to the standard socialization processes. These tales are meant to serve as stepping stones to a different, more just society through their redirected socialization processes. Mistress I in spite of being a computer programme some how acquires a personality and runs away to attain freedom. She leaves her body behind as it is the ‘body’ that could allow the oppressor to enslave her. Beauvoir points out, “Since woman is destined to be possessed, her body must present the inert and passive qualities of an object.” (Beauvoir 157) Mistress i is the projection of a feminist cyborg who has come to existence to recode communication and intelligence in order to subvert command and control:

> The cyborg is a creature in a post-gender world which has no truck with bisexuality, pre-oedipal symbiosis, unalienated labour, or other seductions to organic wholeness through a final appropriation of all the powers of the parts into a higher unity. In a sense, the cyborg has no origin story in the Western sense; a “final” irony since the cyborg is also the awful apocalyptic telos of the “West’s” escalating dominations of abstract individuation, an ultimate self untied at last from all dependency, a man in space... (Haraway 361-62)

Mistress i is a mechanical creature who defies laws and desires freedom from the confinement of cyberspace. As a cyborg she is wary of holism, but needy for connection. Therefore, she tries to befriend Beautiful Ele and her friends. The adventurers help her to escape without bothering about their own possible arrest. She is a trained computer-all knowing, exceedingly clever and powerful. Thus she assists Beautiful after wearing the cloak of invisibility to deal with the DSP and to confront slavery with logic and reason. On her suggestion, Beautiful argues with Vidvanji, “If she’s an individual and not a piece of property, she can’t be yours. That would be slavery. And that’s not just illegal, it’s completely immoral.” (BCR 46) She is a robot about half an inch in size made up of some ‘flickering opaque substance’. Namjoshi writes her name Mistress i in lower case and thus confers upon her a deficient identity. ‘I’ in capital is the denotation of ‘self’ but she is only a spirit of the programme who has left her body behind, thus she is considered an incomplete being.
Her rejection of Vidvanji not only projects her struggle for freedom but also illustrates Haraway's notion of a cyborg. As he further explains:

The main trouble with cyborgs, of course, is that they are the illegitimate offsprings of militarism and patriarchal capitalism, not to mention state socialism. But illegitimate offspring are often exceedingly unfaithful to their origins. Their fathers, after all, are inessential.” (Haraway 361-62)

Namjoshi's fairy tales have proved to be advanced scientific and rational alternatives that can tackle the arbitrary socio-political repression. They also impart sentimental perspectives such as friendship, philanthropy, concern and affection. There occurs a balance between the two binaries i.e. rationality and sentiments. In BCR, Beautiful questions Saint Gyaneshwar, “Being sensible is sensible, isn’t it?” The most prudent Mistress i informs Beautiful, “But being rational isn’t everything, you know.” (32) There is a tug of war between the two as the writer confers equal importance on both and demonstrates that the excessive use of either is hazardous. She further illustrates that continuous clinging to rationality is destructive to both the human and non-human world. Val Plumwood in Environmental Culture: The Ecological crisis of Reason (2002) argues that Western culture's obsession with rationality is not only irrational, but what pretends to be rationality is itself irrational and has led to our existing ecological and social crisis. (15) Beautiful's rational resistance to help Europa could have become the cause of destruction for the moon whose orbit has been disintegrated slightly. Sril sympathizes with the wailing Europa and is determined to help her any how. The dilemma of the true nature of Europa is overcome by the message sent by the Marine Sage in which she mentions, “Received your message. We will set up an instant barrier should Eu prove troublesome. But she does in fact, need your help. Her orbit is deteriorating fast.” (SSF 50) The logical outlook of Beautiful could have been disastrous if Sril had not intervened.

The writer is sympathetic to Europa. This highlights her humane approach typical of the East. Her monotonous rotation along her orbit, lonely and in search of a friend, and Sril's response to her invokes the eco-feminist in Namjoshi. She believes firmly that individuals could be civilized in a natural way to accomplish a spiritual admiration for nature and needs of all living things. Her belief in Pantheism makes her consider Europa a living being. She wishes to encourage a helpful attitude among children and make them sensitive towards all human and non-human creatures. The
depiction of Europa as a living being involves fantasy which is another significant aspect of fairy tales that assists the readers, children in particular, to see things clearly. Fairy tales are the most fundamental imaginative expressions of laymen, and project how to alter society. They play upon the fancy not to run off into an impossible world but to make better links with reality. They flee from defeating situations which kindle the desire of emancipation.

Fantasy could be applied in the form of magic, myths, prophecies and legends that are not only meant to mesmerize or spell bind the readers but to make them enlightened. According to Europa’s myth, she is the only talking sphere in the space and needs a friend to chat with, reflects the droning and dull existence of heavenly bodies. Otto in MWE, the cousin of Grendel has the power to eat words/ name and end one’s existence or identity. He invokes the question whether the existence of something is dependent on its name or not. Hans Blumenberg in Work on Myth proposes that the function of Myth is to help human beings to manage the inevitability of given reality, a requirement that is not outdated by scientific progress and rationality. He adds that a mythology is a religion in which we no longer believe. Like many poets and writers have used myths of gods and goddesses, Namjoshi also mythicizes Gyaneshwar Maharaj- a saint in BCR. Beautiful’s devotion to and conversation with him in her imagination projects a talking god/ idol and expresses her concern for the imponderable forces that lie behind the visible universe. He acts as an advisor and a guide for her. It is this confrontation with the saint that compels her to order her own world of thought and action, and also conveys a message to children that the solutions of one’s own dilemmas lay within one self. It is not Gyaneshwar Maharaj, indeed, who guides her, but her own consciousness that helps her to clear her doubts. Once she asks the Maharaj:

“Do you think I could ever be a saint?”

“Do you want to be a saint?” Shri Gyaneshwar Maharaj asked.

“I don’t, think so,” Beautiful replied doubtfully.

“Ah well, there’s your answer,” the saint told her. (BCR 270)

The adventurers were scared of being arrested by the police for they had been charged by Vidvanji for the theft of his PPC. The mess leads Beautiful to turn to the saint again. The saint replies:

“You know what you should do,” the saint told her.

“What’s that?” Beautiful asked.
“Breathe in and out. Calm down. Make your mind as clear as possible. And then deal with whatever you have to deal with the saint told her.”

Suddenly Beautiful felt better. (ECR 41)

The red dragon whom Goldie meets in Hong Kong—the city of dragons, tells the legend of the Tenth Dragon, “By the way, Sir, I have been posted here to welcome the Tenth Dragon. According to the prophecy he’s expected to arrive around about this time.” (MWE 24) The next prophecy is made in GCL, according to which, “a long lost lion cub prince would return when the city was in trouble and set things right.” (9) Gardy is considered to be the ‘lost lion cub’ by Sir Leon. Cross-cultural identities are a distinct feature of Namjoshi’s work. They often serve to ward off the social as well as religious stigma attached to lesbianism in the mainstream religions and societies. The multiple imaginative and fantastic dimensions of fairy tales provide a suitable vehicle. In the Third World text, Namjoshi lacks the openness of the works set in the First World.

In Namjoshi’s works, predictions and foretellings are fulfilled in alternative manners that disenchant believers. They visualize clearly the manipulations made by them in order to retain their faith. The lion cub is proved to be the lost lion cub prince who has returned to help, but Gardy’s own denial makes things clear to Sir Leon. When the things are resolved, the latter thanks him to which Gardy replies wisely:

“You are truly the lost lion cub prince who returned to help us.”

“Please, Sir Leon,” Gardy protested. “I’m not long lost, and I’m not a prince. I’m a lion cub. And I’m no more noble than anyone else is. We were all glad to be of help.”

“Well, if that is so,” said Sir Leon slowly trying to get things clear inside his head, “if that is so, then Noble Gardy, everyone is noble.”

(GCL 65-67)

The other dragons are amazed by the arrival of the eleventh dragon as no prophecy was made for its coming:

“There is no prophecy about the Eleventh Dragon,” moaned the white Dragon.

Otto glanced at Monkeyji, and she seemed to approve, he stepped forward. “The beautiful dragon is Opal,” he told them. “She is called The Unexpected One.” (MWE 65)
The myth associated with the Tenth Dragon remains unfulfilled as the native seven
dragons of Hong Kong catch sight of Opal- the Eleventh Dragon. Manipulations take
place and Opal is addressed as The Unexpected One. The writer conveys that the
predictions are not always true as they simply contain possibilities. The choices rest
with individuals:

As regards knowledge, the future- in so far as we are not concerned
with the purely organized and rationalized part of it- presents itself as
an impenetrable medium, an unyielding wall. And when our attempts
to see through it are repulsed, we first become aware of the necessity
of willfully choosing our course and, in close connection with it, the
need for an imperative (a utopia) to drive us onward. Only when we
know what are the interests and imperatives involved, are we in a
position to inquire into the possibilities of the present situation, and
thus to gain our first insights into history. (Mannheim)

Namjoshi uses magic and enchantment not just to charm the readers but to sort
out confusions and to fulfill repressed desires. Fairy tales preserve hope for advanced
and better life and the wonderful elements of magic and miracles work to bring about
an actual achievement of the wishes of the leading characters who are often victims of
social biases. Sir Leon and the old woman under the sea make use of the magical
mirrors in order to see things clearly, but ironically the mirrors are enigmatic for they
blur things instead of bringing them to light. Sir Leon gets scared by the threats of the
Sea Guardian- the old woman, for depriving the former of the word ‘No’, robbing the
merchants of the city of the idea of money and taking away the taste of sweets from
all the children. He appeals to the adventurers for help. When they console him, he
replies:

And it’s all going to happen. You’ll see. You’ll see.”
Baby Shark was puzzled, “Well, why did you call us,” he asked, “if it’s
all going to happen anyway?”
Sir Leon looked at them slyly. It’s just possible that you might be able
to prevent it from happening. The future isn’t fixed you know. And
anyway, I can’t see everything absolutely clearly.” (GCL 26)
The two omniscient mirrors are like the ordinary eyes which fail to assist them to
protect the City of Lions. The third plain mirror provided by the Island Sage that
reflects mere faces symbolizes the third eye of Lord Shiva of Hindu mythology as it
endows the guardians with the fortitude, sensitivity and rationality which are needed to cope with the enemy within. The plain mirror according to the writer illustrates that sometimes ordinary things are more valuable and vice-versa. The tug of war between Sir Leon and the old woman for power and authority deplores materialistic behaviour and race for supremacy. The tale is a satire on modern politics. It presents the contemporary political scenario with corrupt government officials and authoritarians who constantly deride each other. Egocentricism, pride and superiority are their chief concerns. Their menace against land and sea respectively demonstrates their deprivation and the lack of essential virtues like intelligence, diligence and responsibility. The adventurers attempt to reconcile them and persuade them to remove all the threats, while the old lady boasts:

"Oh that’s only a slap on the wrist,” the old lady retorted. “I can’t remove all my threats. It’s necessary to demonstrate my power once in a while.” She further says, “How am I to demonstrate to Sir Leon that I am more important than he is?” (GCL 41, 44)

The writer chooses the third world countries as location so as to make children aware of racism and other prevailing oppressing conditions that result in marginalization of the subalterns. Race, as we all know is a complex, socially mediated construct that orders society, marginalizes people and is used to justify, economic and educational inequalities. Sir Leon refuses to talk to other adventurers with the exception of Gardy- the lion cub for he considers them inferior beings. He states:

“Lions only speak to lions you know...” Well Noble Gardy, since you insist, I can make an exception of the two dragons and the beautiful elephant and possibly of the little shark. They are noble beasts. Oh, and I will of course; speak to the human child; but as for the ant and the monkey they are beneath my notice.” (GCL 19)

Grendel’s cousin Otto’s greenish complexion makes the latter strange for other boys in the boarding school of Hong Kong. Grendel worries, “Well, as you know, my mother and I have greenish skins, and so has my cousin, Otto. The other boys thought this strange and began to tease him.” (MWE 19) Otto tries to make friends but he discards the idea due to his rejection by other boys in the school. He tells the adventurers, “I don’t want or need any friends. I tried making friends with some of the boys here even after they have called me names, but that only made matters worse”
(32). The problem of Otto signifies the troubles of many children in a boarding school. Namjoshi herself had been the victim of scorn and ridicule in the American Boarding School as mentioned in Goja. Thus Otto’s character could be self referential for the writer as she has been teased for her colour and gender. Michael Omi and Howard Winant in Racial Formation in the United States define race as “a concept which signifies and symbolizes social conflicts and interests by referring to different types of human bodies.” (55)

On one side the writer describes racial aspects and the sense of alienation, while on the other she projects the feeling of belongingness and feel- at- home atmosphere. A cockatoo, an immigrant of Australia in Singapore finds herself comfortable, exhorts Beautiful to feel the same when the latter tells Aditi the reason for going slow:

“I’m trying to walk as casually as possible and look as though I belonged here,” Beautiful retorted.

A sulphur- crested cockatoo perched on a branch nearby overheard her, “Of course you belong here,” he told Beautiful. “I myself am partial to elephants. Please, make yourself at home.” (GCL 52-53)

The writer takes into account various experiences and difficulties faced by immigrants in alien worlds. Sometimes they are abandoned and deserted and are mocked at, while some other times they come across someone who welcomes them. The Beautiful Ele finds the friendship of the cockatoo who assists her in finding the sparrow. The sparrow later acts as a judge in the contest of Sir Leon and the old woman for superiority. Otto is bullied by his colleagues that he develops hatred for friendship and transforms into a word- eater. Immigrants in a foreign nation are implied word- eaters as they swallow the foreign words and internalize them.

The tales project Namjoshi as a language expert as she uses linguistic elements such as syntax, semantics and morphology. The fairy tales, meant for children, are like tutors who explain and teach children the correct use of language. Beautiful is assisted by Aditi in improving her sentences and sorting out meanings. She asks Beautiful to use the right syntax so that she can express the intended meaning. Beautiful is keen to learn and wants to understand the sentence, ‘Muddled syntax makes for garbled logic’, written by Aditi’s tutor on her exercise book. Aditi explains:

I think she meant that the way in which I construct and order my sentences matters. If I say: ‘I went for a walk, and I saw Beautiful’, 
then that means I saw you on my walk. But if I say ‘I saw Beautiful
and I went for a walk, then it means that I went for a walk after I saw
you.” (BCR 10)

The writer’s love for vocabulary and new words projects itself in the personalities of
Siril and Gardy who have hoarded words written on silver papers in the form of balls
in their pouches. Their familiarity with the length and size of the balls helps them to
easily recognize the words without opening them. Namjoshi gives a vivid account of
Otto’s transformation from a boy to a Word Eater and the King of the Crows:

It turns out that when the Word Eater tried to eat the bad words the
boys called him, they stuck in his throat, so he chucked them in the
flower beds in the garden in his school. Some crows who were sitting
on the roof tops thought he was throwing them bread crumbs. They
flew down and scoffed them up like chips or peanuts. The crows really
liked them. They keep hoping he’ll throw them a few more words.

They call him Otto the Word Eater, King of the Crows. (MWE 21)

The portrayal of new and unusual words could be marked in the play of adventurers’
trick of word exchange in which they make a deal to supply new words to him and
take back the snatched words. The endeavor of Siril and Gardy for the supply of lexis
having bad connotation such as ‘arthritis’ fails. This is not liked by Otto and he orders
the crows to attack them. The adventurers counter attack with the large silver balls of
words. They have attained maximum size with the use of the ‘grow large’ potion.
Larger balls were hurled for greater effect. They used long words such as,
PALINDROME, LACHRYMOSE, ICHTHYOSAURUS, SOMNABULISM,
IGNOMINIOUS etc. in order to tame and control them. (43- 46) But Goldie breathes
in a hundred silver balls and exhales them at the crows in a group formation. The
clash ends with the extra- ordinary powers of Monkeyji who controls the situation
with a strange beam of grey light, “A beam of grey light shot from Monkeyji’s eye
and enclosed Otto. As the others watched, Otto rose three feet into the air and was
turned upside down. Then he was given a little shaking so that everything in his
pockets fell out.” (48) Then the boy is frozen and asked not to repeat his misconduct.
Namjoshi’s tales reflect sharp criticism of traditional child rearing methods and
punishments employed to make children into good and responsible citizens. She uses
fairy tales as a radical mirror to reflect what was wrong with the traditional discourse
on etiquettes and regulations in society, and comments by altering the particular
discourse on civilization in the fairy tale genre. She abandons corporal punishment or physical and mental torture. She prefers to play with children’s psychology in order to bring them on the right track. The adventurer’s attack on Otto is not meant to cause any harm but to defend themselves. He is attacked not by any weapon but mere words which are far from making any damage.

For being a feminist fairy tale, *Heroes* is not only concerned about children’s issues but also includes feminist aspects in order to make children aware of the prevailing disparities and to train them to counter the sinister forces of society. The writer choses fairy tales as a medium to impart feminist values as they have greater impact on a child’s psychology. Her use of binaries and paradoxes such as magic/realism, rationalism/sentimentalism along with the advancement in science and technology is a means to elevate the Third World nations such as India.

*Aditi Adventures* are specifically dedicated to Namjoshi’s niece, Aditi. They explore the psyche of all the children of the contemporary modern world. The readers are taken around the world to peep into multiple cultural traditions and the type of marginalization prevailing there. However, the usual fairy tales are meant to amuse, but Aditi stories are feminist fairy tales- highly philosophical that not only deal with children’s issues but also consider feminist aspects in general and act as a guide to train them to defy and distort the biased patriarchal societal norms. As modern tales they are enriched with the use of hi-tech gadgets and cultivate rationality along with the vital fairy tales contents such as, fantasy, miracles and magic in order to deal with the problems of the real world.
Works-Cited


Chapter Five

Conclusion

"Love is the Law"
Conclusion

Born in Bombay, India, in the year 1941, in an elite Hindu family, Namjoshi lost her father, Captain Manohar Vinayak Namjoshi- a senior test pilot in the year 1953 in a plane crash, at the age of 12. Her mother, Sarojini Naik Nimbalkar belonged to the princely states of Phalton, Maharashtra, India. Namjoshi acquired her early education in an American boarding school in the north of India and later was sent to Rishi Valley School somewhere in the south of the Indian sub-continent. From the University of Pune she obtained her graduate and post-graduate degrees in English Literature in the year 1961 and 1963 respectively. For a year she taught as a lecturer at Fergusson College, Pune and in 1964 was selected in the Indian Administrative Service. It was after she joined the IAS, she took up writing verse. She got her master’s degree in Public Administration at the University of Missouri in America after taking leave from the government of India in 1968, and in 1969, resigned from the IAS and attained her doctorate degree on the Cantos of Ezra Pound, at Mc Gill University, Montreal, Canada (1969- 1972). From 1972 till 1989, she lectured at Scarborough College, University of Toronto. It was during a sabbatical in 1978- 79 that Namjoshi went to England and spent time in London and also at Cambridge and came across to the evolving feminist and gay liberation movements. Her literary career began with poetry, and later she experimented upon fables and fairy tales.

Being a radical lesbian feminist, Namjoshi wants to convey that gender oppression is the root cause of other forms of oppression that function at all levels in a male dominated society, and that institutionalized heterosexuality is the root of patriarchal control of women. Thus a new political, economic and social foundation is needed to end the patriarchy’s oppression of women. The writer attempts to do so through her fables and fairy tales, as they are imaginative and are woven around a world of fantasy, while in the real world discrimination is a continuous process. So after taking all these issues and organizing them according to her own desires, she finds solace and satisfaction. But this does not mean that in doing so she tries to escape from the situation. Her distortion of the original myths and the fairy tales and revisioning and rewriting them, is a means to question the conventional male biases about women. Her collection, Feminist Fables encompasses the large variety of experiences of the subordinated and the marginalized, and fictionalizes their cause with a view to upgrade their position and release them from traditional enslavement.
She has analyzed the effects of women’s oppression at multiple levels such as reproduction, education, employment, self determination, political voice, body image, working to make it clear how these are part of a larger system of oppression.

By constructing mythical characters, Namjoshi deconstructs the notion of conventional gendering and emphasizes the irrelevance of human particularities. She also points out that identities are not fixed. They are ‘fluid’ and can be transformed into the desired shape. The process of change is painful yet essential. A new path has to be forged outside patriarchal discourse. The new identity is not a limited one as it is ‘fluid’. It retains the scope for further reconfigurations and reinscriptions. The new woman who emerges is prepared to write down all this. Bhadravati, the Brahmini lesbian cow, appears like a goddess to Suniti the protagonist in *The Conversations of Cow*. She is the cow of a thousand faces who knows the art of transmutation. Her attributes symbolize that identity is constitutive of as well as by the persona.

Namjoshi’s concern is the actual process of marginalization and ‘othering’ through which the dominant cultures perpetuate patriarchal ideologies. In *The Blue Donkey Fables*, she criticizes the institutions which have created fixed notions about identities and female bodies. She deconstructs the stereotypical ideas about gender, societal constructs and culture. She dismantles binaries of good and evil, heroism and cowardice, wisdom and foolishness, truth and lies, angels and saints etc. Being the propagator of ecofeminism which takes the issues of women along with nature and animals’ rights, Namjoshi projects the fictional animals as dignified beings who unlike the real animals have self respect and resist humiliation. Her idea of pantheism puts a soul in every living and non- living objects and helps her to weave stories about animals. She shows her concern for ordinary animals such as cats, monkeys, donkeys, piglets, rabbits, frogs etc. who have been marginalized not only in the real world but also in literature.

Suniti Namjoshi’s fiction attempts to establish an alternative universe through the use of the fantasy mode. Namjoshi resorts to fantasy not to escape from reality but to reconstruct it. She reworks ancient and canonical myths and fables in order to define the new, feminist lesbian identity. In the process, she discovers untold stories and also creates new ones. Through the use of animal imagery, Namjoshi discusses the problems of the Third World women writers, animals’ rights, power hierarchy and sexual orientation. She herself is frequently the protagonist in her works. In this role her concern is to explore the motives behind and the consequences of categorizing
and labeling individual, races and communities as negative. She disrupts mainstream notions of gender, race, nationality and sexual preference.

In *The Mothers of Maya Diip*, the writer applies different radical feminist’s theories and projects the idea that discarding male domination would liberate the world from oppression. Procreation has been made suppressive by men. She wants to free women from biological maternity so as to free maternity from male domination. But at the same time all her efforts are wasted as differences and discriminations may exist even in a matriarchal society. The inner world of Namjoshi’s narrative accommodates multiple lesbian perspectives. Female desire is discussed openly and unabashedly. She redeems the dignity of women and presents them as satisfied happy beings who celebrate their own sexuality and femininity. She wants to convey that feminine theory, language and social order may be multiple and pluralistic like that of phallocentric order that translates from sexuality to language and theory. She also creates a new discourse of maternity that can generate societal association to provide women a new identity where they do not feel the necessity to decide between a career and motherhood. Her characters such as Valerie and Jyanvi find their salvation in their sexual choices as they escape from their male infidelity. The folklore format of the novel softens the edge of reality yet engages it in reflections on gender politics, while the inter-textuality evokes a continuing dialogue on the quest for identity.

Suniti Namjoshi’s works explore the dialogic aspects of literature. The ancient oral tales, fairy tales, pagan and Christian mythologies are interpolated and furthered to create the meaning desired by the author. The collections engage in witty, ironic as well as discreet and sophisticated discussions on gender politics and female desire. The feminist renderings subvert the conventional motifs and create a powerful new vision. Namjoshi fundamentally questions the appropriacy of the tales told to children. Fairy tales and fables heard in childhood shape the notion of right and wrong and influence one’s adult roles. In *Saint Suniti and the Dragon* she not only questions the notions of evil and good but also propagates feminine solidarity and attempts to find solutions to the dilemmas of contemporary existence. She defends women’s freedom to make sexual choices. Her cross-referencing is both artistic and purposeful.

Through her collection *The Solidarity Fables*, Namjoshi questions sexual politics and challenges the patriarchal constructs. She is against forceful adoption of heterosexuality, but she does not propagate lesbianism, as the choice of one’s own sex
is purely a personal issue. She attempts to reorganize the world with the re-writing of old fables and fairy tales, and interrogates the marginalization of the subalterns in a patriarchal society and inspires them to struggle for identity and autonomy.

Male writers developed their own culture of writing in which the role of women is marginalized and excluded. Her work *Building Babel* is suggestive of the process of the development of a new culture of writing that is gynocentric in nature. She also deals with the writer, art of writing, reader and readership and emphasizes the use of Web to make reading and writing interesting and convenient. Her technique of selecting the characters of old fairy tales and mythical archetypes provides her opportunity to revise, rewrite, construct and deconstruct the fixed notions and stereotypes of androcentric society. In *Building Babel*, we are introduced to the familiar literary and mythical characters with a little retention and a little inversion of the original. Little Red, Alice, Rap- Rap or Rapunzel, Mad Med or Medusa, Snow White, Cinders or Cinderella, Rose Green, Sister Sol, Lady Shy, Black Piglet, Verity and Charity etc. have been evoked from their original sources in order to get rid of the stereotypes and biases attached to them. In *Goja: An Autobiographical Myth*, her use of fantasy fills the gap between the huge divisions such as the East and the West, rich and the poor, lesbian and straight etc.

Apart from being a poet, a fabulist and a novelist, Suniti Namjoshi has experimented with Children’s Literature as well. As a feminist, she is dissatisfied with the dominant male discourse of traditional fairy tales, the sexist social values and institutions it supports. Classical fairy tales contain sexist and racist attitudes and serve the socialization process. They place great stress upon submissiveness and self-sacrifice, incarceration in homes for girls, and upon competition and accumulation of wealth for boys. They encourage children to emulate fixed gender roles and thus curtail their free development. Namjoshi’s fairy tales on the other hand aim at a just society that can be gleaned from the redirection socialization process. Her tales provide equal status to both young boys and girls without discriminating. She emphasizes equal participation of children in every sphere of life. Like other fairy tale writers she provides equal opportunities. All the tales of *Aditi Adventures I- Unlikely Friends*, attempt to explore the psyche of children of the contemporary modern world. While providing amusement to children, the tales establish respect and affinity with creatures other than the Anglo-Saxon heterosexual male. They break down
stereotypes, boundaries and categories and challenge the stringency of norms applied to society by patriarchy.

Namjoshi is of the view that by altering and introducing unusual elements into the fairy tales, the child is compelled to discard a certain consistent reception and reconsider constituents and meaning. As children are the primary audience of fairy tales, these tales play an important role in early socialization. Feminist fairy tale writers try to change our outlook and defy our perception with regard to literature and society. Fairy tales are considered therapies for children as they open up unexplored spheres. They help children to control their lives. A characteristic feature of the fairy tale is to sort out existential quandary or quest for identity. This enables children to deal with crises and predicaments. Children are thus able to master these psychological problems.

The writer seems to be quite familiar with different parts of the world. In all the tales of the series of Aditi Adventures II- The Unexpected Monsters, she explores four diverse cultures of various European countries. She starts the adventure from Italy and then moves to Devon in England, her present home place. Then she takes the readers from Hungary to Czech Republic and familiarizes them with mountains, hills, rivers, language and people. Blue grotto, Island Capri, Mount Vesuvious, Curne, clotted cream of Devon, Mogra flowers of India, forints- the currency of Hungary, tomb of Gul Baba, Kiraly Baths, River Danube, all are described in a beautiful manner.

The Unexpected Monsters is concerned with legendary characters of Europe, recast by the writer to dismantle biases associated with them. The tales act as directories to liberate children from ego disturbances with the use of fantasy that has the power to make the unfamiliar familiar. They also serve as guides for parents to deal with the difficulties of taming and raising children in an appropriate manner. The witty dialogues on identity and perception, lend the text a philosophical touch. In Namjoshi's works, predictions and foretellings are fulfilled in alternative manners that disenchant believers. They visualize clearly the manipulations made by them in order to retain their faith.

Aditi Adventures III- Heroes, is not only concerned with children's issues but also includes feminist aspects in order to make children aware of the prevailing disparities and to train them to counter the sinister forces of society. Her use of binaries and paradoxes such as magic/realism, rationalism/sentimentalism along with
the advancement in science and technology is a means to elevate the Third World nations such as India. *Aditi Adventures* are specifically dedicated to Namjoshi’s niece, Aditi. They explore the psyche of all the children of the contemporary modern world. The readers are taken around the world to view multiple cultural traditions and the type of marginalization prevailing there. However, the usual fairy tales are meant to amuse, but Aditi stories are feminist fairy tales—highly philosophical that not only deal with children’s issues but also consider feminist aspects in general and act as a guide to train them to understand the biased patriarchal societal norms. As modern tales they are enriched with the use of hi-tech gadgets and cultivate rationality along with the vital fairy tales contents such as, fantasy, miracles and magic in order to deal with the problems of the real world.

Namjoshi is concerned about subalterns and the marginalized, human and animal rights. She uses lesbianism as a counter discourse to patriarchy. She has depicted multiple perspectives of lesbian identities and leaves one’s sexuality as a personal choice. Her experiment of creating a matriarchal set-up in *Mothers of Maya Dilp* is an attempt in that direction. She identifies herself with animals for culturally, they are considered as ‘other’. She seeks solace in the animal world as it is placid, docile and simple. Through the fictional character—Asha of *Mothers of Maya Dilp*, she desires a patriarchy free set-up where both men and women along with flora-fauna enjoy equal rights and celebrate equal freedom. *Aditi Adventures* symbolize the ideal world where ‘love is the law’, a world where we find no discrimination among men, women, beasts and nature.
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